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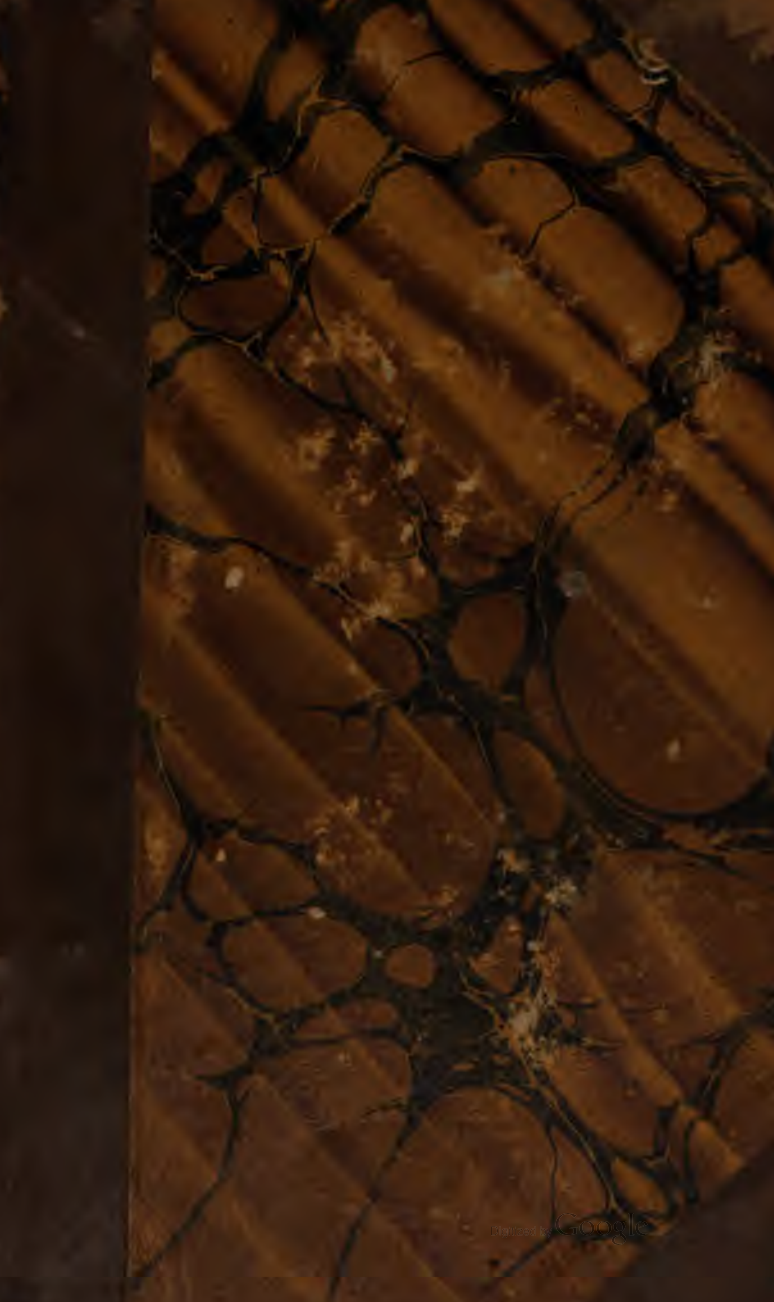
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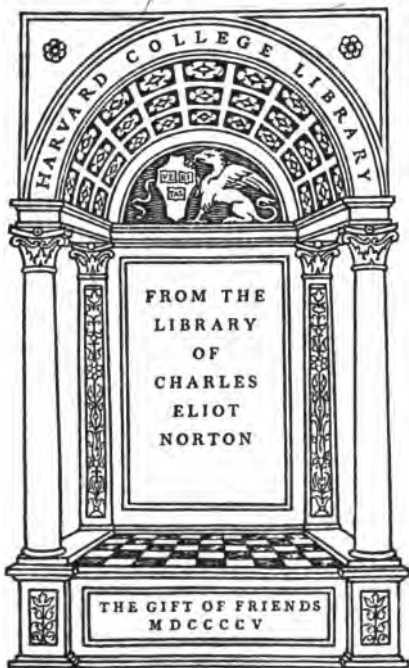
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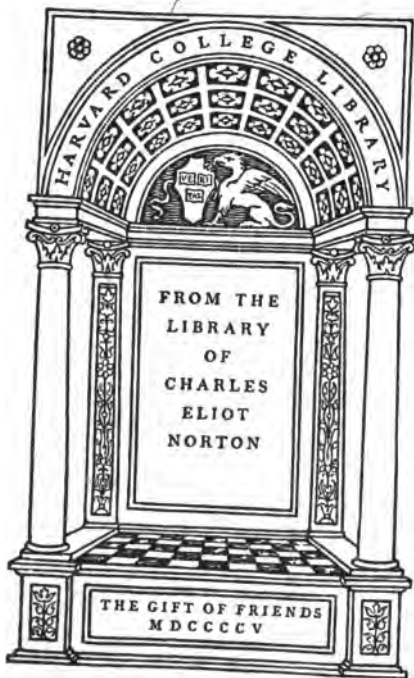


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William Mudford

THE FIVE NIGHTS

OF

ST. ALBANS.

A ROMANCE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

BY THE

Author of "First and Last."

"A MYSTERY, envelop'd in a cloud
Of CHARMING HORROR, barricadoed round
With dainty riddles; guarded by a crowd
Of quiet contradictions."
BRAUMONT'S PSYCHE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

THE FIRST AMERICAN, FROM THE SECOND LONDON EDITION.

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CAREY, HART & CO.

1833.

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JUL 8 1912

From the Library
of the United States
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THE AUTHOR
TO A
DISCERNING PUBLIC.

Two years have elapsed since the first appearance of the following work, and its reception was sufficiently gratifying, if the approbation of those whose authority is never disputed when graciously exercised, may be taken at its fair valuation. As to critics, who are insensible to an author's merits, it is an utter impossibility *they* should be right. Praise, indeed, is so agreeable a thing in itself, and we are always so willing to repose an amiable confidence in those who have an equally amiable perception of our own perfections, that a man would get little credit for sincerity who pretended to doubt these facts. For my part, I frankly acknowledge I am above such puerile affectation; and I am the more solicitous to make the confession, because any mistake upon the subject might be the means of depriving me of much deserved commendation hereafter, seeing that there is a natural repugnance in mankind to force favours even upon the most deserving.

But praise, though a piquant garnish, will not do for a meal. When Hamlet informs his father's courtiers that he is "promise-crammed," he judiciously adds, "you cannot

feed capons so;” and it may be asserted with equal justice, that praise alone cannot feed authors. It is Grumio’s “mustard” without the “beef;” the seed-time and not the harvest; the promise and not the performance; the delicious foretaste, but not the satisfying fruition. Should, therefore, the success of *this* edition of “THE FIVE NIGHTS OF ST. ALBANS,” provide the beef, ripen the harvest, realize the promise, and procure the fruition, I can only say it will be particularly agreeable.

The fact is, (and why should so important a matter be concealed?) I have taken my reputation into my own hands, resolved to enjoy, in fee-simple, to me and to my heirs for ever, all and every of the rents, profits, gains, and moneys therefrom arising. It will be a sinecure, I suspect; but it is needless to add, I should not have embarked in so grave a business, had I not learned upon good and sufficient authority, that in no other way was there a probability of my enjoying any thing beyond what hath already reached my pocket—the most insecure of all places for such matters.

It is said there are secrets in all families. I believe it; because, (with Aristotle’s permission) there are secrets in all trades. Now, no one can properly understand the secrets of authorship and bookselling, except authors and booksellers; and, therefore, (with Aristotle’s permission again) however intense the curiosity may be, from one end of the country to the other, to discover the secret of this edi-

tion of "the Five Nights,"—why it comes forth in ~~the~~ manner and under the circumstances aforesaid, I do not think I should be justified in satisfying it. At any rate, it will not be prudent to do so till the seventh edition is published. That I am not, however, disposed to withhold any thing from the public, to which the public has a right, may be taken for granted, I think, from what I have already said; but lest that should be deemed insufficient, I beg leave farther to add, in the language of a candidate for a seat in Parliament, that "in thus coming forward I have been *solely* influenced by a *sincere desire* to serve the *public*."

At the same time it would be a departure from the frankness and candour which are so apparent, I hope, in all I have said, if I did not avow (which a parliamentary candidate never does, except by his actions,) that in serving the public I look to serve myself. There is another thing, which the same love of sincerity impels me to mention. Should I, instead of putting any thing into my pocket by this undertaking, never see that back again which I have been forced to put out of it, I shall at once take the highest legal opinion which the then condition of my pocket may enable me to command, as to my equitable claim upon my CRITICS, who, by seducing me into the belief that the work is really what they describe it, in the testimonials hereunto subjoined, made me naturally anxious to provide it for the thousands who must needs wish to read it; but who, I knew, could not do so with-

out buying it. I am aware it ~~may~~ be retorted, I have been too credulous—too easily imposed upon—too soon satisfied with myself, and so forth: but what little I know of equity (and it is less than the least, *Albernice*, that was ever known by a Chancery barrister) teaches me that it is its peculiar province to relieve innocent parties from the disastrous consequences of their own simplicity in making improvident contracts. As, therefore, in the supposed, but devoutly deprecated contingency, there would be no difficulty in proving the improvidence, I conclude there will be none in obtaining the remedy. So I advise my critics to beware, and to do all that in them lies, fairly and honourably, to see me harmless through an enterprise of their own producing.

LONDON,
June, 1831.

THE
FIVE NIGHTS

OF
ST. ALBANS.

CHAPTER I.

It was towards the latter end of September, in the year 1570, that Hugh Clayton, and Marmaduke Peverell, two substantial yeomen of the ancient town of St. Albans, were returning home from Dunstable, when, just upon the hour of midnight, they came within sight of the venerable towers of the Abbey. They were proceeding leisurely along, their horses somewhat the worse of a long day's journey, as the Abbey bell tolled the first hour of twelve. Suddenly, the whole building presented the appearance of one solid mass of deep red fire, but without casting forth flame or smoke, or shedding one ray of light upon surrounding objects. It resembled a huge furnace, glowing with intense heat; and from the magnitude of the building, the effect was at once terrific and sublime.

Peverell was the first who observed the strange spectacle. "By my soul," said he, stopping his horse, "the Abbey is on fire—look how it is burning!"

"Burning," quoth Clayton, "truly I think the burning is all over; and what we see are only the ruins! for, do you mark, there is neither smoke nor flame."

"You are right," rejoined Peverell, "and, what is strange, there seems no bustle in the town. Listen! All is still, and, save yon burning mass, all is dark. Let us push on, and learn what has happened."

So saying, they clapped spurs to their jaded steeds, and in a few minutes entered the town.

To their great surprise, they found no persons stirring. Every house was closed; and the inhabitants were all quietly asleep in their beds. But still greater was their surprise, when, directing their looks towards the Abbey, they could no longer perceive the burning ruins which had first attracted their notice.

"What can all this mean?" said Peverell, in a half whisper, to his companion, "We saw it, and now—"

"Hush!" interrupted Clayton, while he crossed himself devoutly; "let us watch for a few minutes."

They did so; but to no purpose. Where they had seen, the fiery edifice, was now a mere black void; for the night was too dark to permit of their distinguishing the towers or walls of the Abbey.

"Are we awake?" continued Clayton, after a pause, "or have we been dreaming all this time?"

"It was no dream," answered Peverell, "and, for my own part, I am determined to find out, whatever it is. I'll ride up to the Abbey door, and if the arch-fiend himself be sitting there, I'll ask him what he has been about."

"Don't be fool-hardy," exclaimed Clayton, catching hold of the bridle of Peverell's horse; "you know there are strange stories told about this Abbey—since the grievous sin committed by our eighth Henry. They do say—"

"Yes," rejoined Peverell, laughing, "they do say that the devil, once a month, feasts and revels here, with a few choice souls of monks and friars, whom he brings with him to revive the recollection of old times, when the oily rogues themselves, wallowed in the lusts of the flesh, as pious churchmen of those days were wont to do."

Clayton was silent. He did not half relish what he considered as the profane jesting of his companion; for besides being a devout catholic, he was also prone to superstition, and entertained very orthodox notions about evil spirits, benign fairies, and mischievous goblins. Peverell, on the contrary, had but little fear of what man could do to him, and none of what might befall him from spirits of another world. So he spurred his horse, and galloped up to the walls of the Abbey. Clayton, who, of two evils, preferred following a fearless swaggerer to remaining alone with his own misgivings, also put spurs to his horse; but not without sundry pious ejaculations as

they proceeded, partly addressed to himself in the way of comfort, and partly intended to dissuade his companion from his enterprise, if the clattering of their horses' feet would have allowed him to hear them.

In a few minutes they were under the walls of the Abbey—and, to their mutual surprise, there stood the walls, massive, gloomy, and frowning, just as they had seen them in the morning when they set out for Dunstable.

“Well!” quoth Peverell, after a short pause, “I am satisfied.”

“And so am I,” rejoined Clayton.

But the satisfaction of the latter, was of a far different quality to that of the former. Clayton was satisfied, that the devil and his imps, or some other supernatural personages, had been at their gambols. Peverell was satisfied, they had been befooled by their own fancies.

By this time the chimes had gone a quarter past twelve, and slowly retracing their steps, they sought their respective homes. Peverell was in the state of “single blessedness.” Clayton had a bed-fellow; and before he went to sleep, one of the things he did was to recount to his wife the wondrous events of the last half hour. Peverell thought no more about what had happened; but putting on his night-cap, in much less than half an hour, his nose rang a peal scarcely less sonorous than that of the chimes themselves.

The next day, ere noon arrived, one moiety of the townsfolk of St. Albans were engaged in discussing the marvellous adventure which had befallen Clayton and Peverell the night before. Peverell, to do him justice, thought as little about it on the morrow, as he had the preceding night after he had ridden up to the Abbey walls; but no sooner had Clayton satisfied himself, by ocular evidence, in the broad glare of an autumnal sun, that the Abbey still stood where it had been wont to stand, than he imparted to his neighbours, with the usual exaggeration, the miracle he had beheld. His wife, too, had her story at second hand: and, we may be sure, she did not allow it to lose any thing in her repetition. So, between them both, Peverell, who was constantly referred to as a person who could confirm every thing, found himself in as much request as if he had been one of two lucky survivors of an earthquake.

“What was it you saw, Master Clayton?” said an old

man, tottering up to him, who had numbered more than threescore years and ten, with a head as green within as as it was gray without, "what was it you saw?"

"What did I see?" replied Clayton: "I saw the Abbey in flames."

"Mercy on me!" ejaculated the withered inquirer, and hobbled away, thoroughly convinced the Abbey was no more, though a walk of fifty yards would have brought him to its gates.

"I marvel you should talk such nonsense, neighbour," interposed a portly personage, who was standing by, and overheard what had fallen from Clayton: "know you not the Abbey stands where it did? And where, I pray thee, would it stand, if that had happened which you report?"

"I'll tell you what, Master Wolfe," retorted Clayton, his ire something roused by the tart rebuke he had received, "you would swear stoutly enough to-morrow, I judge, if need were, that you saw and conversed with me, to-day—but you would not be more convinced of the truth of what you swore, than I am of what I saw; and so good day, for I must about my business."

Clayton, it is true, had business to mind—but he was not allowed to mind it. Some believed, some doubted, some jeered, his tale of wonder; but believers, disbelievers, and half believers, were alike inquisitive; and scarcely a minute throughout the day was he free from solicitations to repeat the account. Peverell, too, came in for his full share of these gossiping importunities; and *his* mode of relating the occurrence, tended greatly to lift it into the importance which it ultimately attained. He could not deny, nor even qualify, one tittle of the description given by his companion: the fact was undoubtedly as Clayton had represented: the Abbey *did* appear to be in one glowing mass of fire: he saw it with his own eyes: it continued for nearly a minute; and he rode up to its walls, expecting to find them in flames, or in ruins. All this he was compelled to admit, solemnly, seriously, and earnestly; and it availed but little—or, rather it aggravated, intensely, the mystery, that he followed up these admissions by a sturdy determination to believe the whole was any thing rather than supernatural. His incredulity, a sufficient evidence that he was not the sport of superstitious feelings or of idle fears, which many thought was the case with Clayton, imparted to the occurrence a character which fixed the public attention.

It has been already observed, that ere noon, one moiety of the townsfolk of St. Albans, were engaged in discussing this marvellous adventure; and before sun-set, it may be doubted whether there was a tongue in the whole place, from lisping infancy to mumbling age, of which it had not been the burden. So thoroughly had it taken possession of the minds of all, that as midnight approached, the town, instead of sinking into quiet and repose, presented a scene of singular bustle and excitement. No one thought of going to bed. They who lived in houses which commanded a view of the Abbey, were seated at their windows, with their eyes fixed on its gray towers and dusky walls; while hundreds of others, men, and women, and children, the old and the young, the infirm and the crippled, gradually gathered themselves into groups, at every spot whence the edifice was visible.

The hum of stifled voices might be heard, and sometimes the sound of suppressed merriment, proceeding from those who did not doubt they were making egregious fools of themselves. But it was curious to observe how this incredulous gaiety dwindled away, as the Abbey chimes tolled near the approach of midnight; and when the third quarter after eleven had struck, you might have fancied not a human being was then waking, so profound a silence pervaded the multitude. They who expected to behold a fearful vision, were wrought up to the highest pitch of supernatural excitement; while they who expected nothing, still felt that the moment was at hand when something *might*, perhaps, take place.

The night was dark, but in the deep blue vault above, myriads of stars were gleaming with that calm lustre, which seemed to shed no light beyond their own spheres. And now a scene presented itself which struck terror into the stoutest heart. The Abbey clock began to strike—when suddenly a sound like the rushing of mighty waters, or of a blast of wind roaring through a grove of forest trees, was heard, and the next moment, devouring flames appeared to wrap the walls in one vast sheet of fire. A cry of horror burst from the multitude—the shrieks of women, and the screaming of children, were mingled with the hoarser exclamations of fear uttered by the men; some fled in dismay, others threw themselves on the ground; wives clung round the necks of their husbands for safety, and hundreds fell upon their knees in a wild agony of

prayer. Meanwhile, the rushing noise continued with increasing loudness—the flames tossed and heaved about, like the waves of a troubled ocean, now seeming to dart from the windows in masses resembling pillars of fire; then curling up the walls as if instinct with life, or flickering in fantastic shapes round the buttresses and towers. But most strange it was, that neither light nor heat was emitted from this awful mockery of a conflagration. From the bottom to the top, it was one burning surface; yet the grass and weeds that fringed the former, were no more revealed to the eye by it, than they were before the mysterious volcano blazed forth.

While the affrighted inhabitants were still under the first influence of this appalling scene, the Abbey clock struck the last hour of twelve, and the whole vanished.

The consternation was, if possible, increased by this new wonder; but it was the consternation of dumb amazement. In a moment every voice was hushed, and the expectation of some fresh horror held them in breathless silence and motionless suspense. They who were fleeing in dismay suddenly stopped, why, they hardly knew. If the wand of a magician had been waved over their heads, with power to fix them to the earth, like so many statues of lifeless stone, the effect could not have been more instantaneous and complete. In a few minutes, the spell began gradually to dissolve; and group after group slowly retired, discoursing, in voices not raised above a whisper, of what they had beheld; or fearfully conjecturing what it might all portend.

One melancholy circumstance accompanied this night of mystery and panic. A poor idiot girl, about sixteen years of age, had been left in bed by her mother, (who was of humble occupation), while she stole out to join the throng of anxious spectators. It was never known under what impulse, or in what way, this witless creature, with merely her night-clothes on, had wandered forth; but so it was; for on her return, the distracted mother found her gone; and the next morning she was discovered a corse, beneath the walls of the Abbey. Whether she had strayed unobserved to the spot, beheld the strange scene of the night before, and fallen a victim to terrors which she could only feel, but not express; or whether, having roamed beyond her knowledge of return, she, after a while, laid her down to sleep, close by where she had seen what she

deemed a warming fire, and so perished from cold, thinly clad as she was, could be nothing more than surmise. It was too true that the poor idiot died, and that her wretched, self-accusing mother, felt more than a mother's anguish for her death. She was her only child, and the very calamity which shut her out from all the rest of the world, made her tenfold more dear to her. "She could have borne her loss," she said, "had it pleased God to take her in the usual way; but she knew her poor Marian had gone in search of her, who had never left her thus before, and so she met her death; and that thought she could not bear."

CHAPTER II.

THE sun which rose on the following morning, greeted many an eye that sleep had not visited during the night. There were few, indeed, who sought their beds at all; for, bewildered by what they had seen, and mingling superstitious with natural fears, they watched, like sentinels at an alarm post, lest the enemy should find them unprepared. What was to happen, no man knew; but that some great calamity, sudden or remote, would take place, earthquake, or famine, pestilence or dire civil war, scarcely any one doubted. To many, who brooded over their terrors in the utter helplessness of overwhelming dismay, it was a joyous sight to behold the first break of morning in the east. They had settled it in their own minds, that the last day was at hand.

With returning light, however, came returning confidence. Darkness is a great breeder of cowards. When a man cannot see what he should fear, he is apt to fear every thing he should not. Long before the usual stirring time shutters were unbarred, windows thrown open, and doors unfastened; and the inmates of every house seemed eager to show their regard for health by early rising. Peverell and Clayton were as brisk as their neighbours in forsaking their beds, and enjoying the fresh air of the morning. And yet it is extremely doubtful whether they

ate their breakfasts with any the better appetite in consequence. But one thing is certain, they might have eaten them without much interruption, for the lapse of four and twenty hours had stripped them of all their attractive qualities. They were no longer the exclusive possessors of a marvellous story. Every one now had seen, not only what they had, but much more. Indeed, each man seemed to have been favoured with a glimpse of something or other, which was visible to himself alone. Certain it is, that though they all looked at the same mysterious object, there were no two accounts of it that exactly tallied.

"Heaven preserve me!" said one; "I never shall forget the hurly-burly of the goblins inside, when the great stone tower fell."

"I did not see the tower fall," quoth another; "for I could not take my eyes off the windows, as they shrivelled up, one after the other, in the flames, like so many scrolls of parchment."

"Yes," added a third, "and well they might. Did you ever see such flames? Why, they were as black as ink, and sent forth such a stench of brimstone; that I was almost choked; and I should have been, too, only I covered my mouth and nose with my bonnet."

"Ay, it was an awful business," interposed a fourth—"a very awful business. God knows what will come of it! But when I saw the old Abbey reel from its foundation, like a drunken man—come towards where I was standing—and at last make a complete sunset, I call the saints of Heaven to witness, I did not know whether I myself stood upon my head or my heels."

"I have seen some service i' the wars," exclaimed an old soldier, who had one arm the less for having borne them, "and know what it is to stand by the side of a demi-culverin, when, in its discharge, it has blown whole ranks into the air; but the roaring of that misbegotten bell, last night, for upwards of half an hour, out-bellowed a double battery of heavy ordnance. I have not yet recovered my hearing on this side," added he, taking the tip of his right ear between his finger and thumb, and shaking it lustily as he spoke.

"Yes," interrupted a lean-visaged artificer, whose weary eyes told he had watched the dreary night through; "and yet it could not out-bellow the groans, and shrieks, and wailings of the tortured spirits, as they were tossing

about in the flames. Oh! what a sight that was! Did you see them?"

"No," replied several voices at once; while each, in succession, as he snatched an opportunity to speak, proceeded to recount what he did see. From effects they travelled to causes, and many a grave explanation was given and profound prediction hazarded.

"Will you have the truth on't," exclaimed one in a loud voice, who had hitherto remained silent, listening, with evident contempt, to all that had been said; "will you have the truth on't?"

"Ay, ay, let us have the truth on't, if it be in thee to give it us, friend Christopher."

Christopher, or rather Kit Barnes, as he was commonly called, was a blacksmith by trade; but he had turned to godliness of late, and thought more of diligently preaching the words of everlasting life, than of diligently plying his anvil and forge. He was a tall, gaunt figure, with a face of due sanctimonious longitude—had a sonorous voice, a sharp, penetrating eye, a considerable fluency of speech, and much of that impressive gesticulation which great earnestness of manner and perfect sincerity of mind, are sure to produce. Hence the influence he possessed over his auditors, so far as fixing their attention went, whenever the spirit moved him to inveigh against the enormities of the age. Had he moved in a different sphere, or could he have commanded a larger theatre to grace his mission and inflame his zeal, Kit would probably have risen to the honours of martyrdom, and shared the fate of those who had testified with their blood, the sincerity of their faith; for he more than shared all their ardour, in asserting and propagating the tenets he espoused.

Poor Kit found a reason for every thing that happened out of the common way, either in the general sinfulness of the times, or in the particular backslidings of the individual who was afflicted, whether it was in person, in spirit, or in purse. The wrath of offended Heaven, and offences to provoke that wrath, comprised his whole system of ethics, and his whole stock of cause and effect. It mattered not to him whether his neighbour's cow disappeared or his wife—whether his trade declined or his health—whether he broke his own leg or another man's head—whether he got into prison or could not get out,—

the primeval curse, the original misery of man, accounted for all. "Of ourselves," he would exclaim, on such occasions, "we be creatures that can bring forth no apples—we be of ourselves, such earth as can bring forth but weeds, nettles, brambles, briars, cockle, and darnel."

When therefore he found the group he had apostrophized, willing to learn from him the truth, or, in other words, what he considered the cause, of the ominous scene they had all witnessed the night before, he gathered up himself in the attitude of one who was about to utter oracles.

"Went ye to the house of God last Sabbath day? Ay, I warrant ye. And what did ye hear? More, I guess, than you mind now, or heeded then. Of what did the parson admonish you? Was it not of your neglect in repairing, keeping clean, and comely adorning God's house? For, doth it not appear in the Holy Scripture, how God's house, which was called his holy temple, and was the mother church of all Jewry, fell sometimes into decay, and was oftentimes profaned and defiled, through the negligence and ungodliness of such as had the charge thereof? And God was sore displeased with his people, because they builded, decked, and trimmed up their own houses, and suffered God's house to be in ruin and decay, to lie uncomely and fulsomely. Wherefore he was sore grieved with them, and plagued them, and thus said he unto them, 'Is it time for you to dwell in your sealed houses, and the Lord's house not regarded?' By these plagues; which God laid upon his people for neglecting of his temple, it may evidently appear that he will have his temple, his church, the place where his congregation shall resort to magnify him, well edified, well repaired, and well maintained. It is sin and shame to see our churches, here in this very city of St. Albans, so ruinous and so foully decayed. If a man's private house wherein he dwelleth be decayed, he will never cease till it be restored up again. Yea, if his barn, where he keepeth his corn, be out of reparations, what diligence useth he to make it in a perfect state again? If his stable for his horse—yea, the sty for his swine, be not able to hold out water and wind, how careful is he to do cost thereon? And shall we be so mindful of our common base houses, deputed to so vile employment, and be forgetful to that house of God, wherein be entreated the words of our

eternal salvation, wherein be ministered the sacraments and mysteries of our redemption?"

The little circle he was addressing, listened with profound attention to this appeal; and Christopher, perceiving not only the effect he was producing, but that he was gathering hearers, kindled into a more animated strain.

"With what earnestness—with what vehement zeal," he continued, "did our Saviour Christ drive the buyers and sellers out of the Temple of God, and hurled down the tables of the changers of money, and the seats of the dove sellers, and could not abide any man to carry a vessel through the temple! Yea, he told them they had made his Father's house a den of thieves, partly through their superstition, hypocrisy, false worship, false doctrine, and insatiable covetousness; and partly through contempt—abusing that place with walking and talking, with worldly matters, without all fear of God, and due reverence to that place."

Here Christopher made a sudden pause, and his countenance indicated that he was communing with himself. It assumed that air of inquisitive cogitation, as if he were mentally debating whether he would or would not give utterance to his sentiments. He eyed his auditory with a half comic glance of dubious scrutiny; but after a moment, assuming a determined energy of manner, he continued,

"Ye know what, of late years, was the face of religion within this realm of England; but, thanks to Almighty God, the superstitious sects of monks and friars, that were in this realm, be clean taken away."

This was wormwood to a part of his auditors, who were not yet so gospelled in the new faith as to abjure the Romish anti-christ and his ministers; and they gave manifest tokens of their displeasure at this allusion to the monks and friars. But Christopher had taken his ground, and was determined to shoot his bolt. So he proceeded thus:

"Ye know, too, what dens of thieves the churches of England have been made by the blasphemous buying and selling the most precious body and blood of Christ, in the mass, as the world was made to believe, at diriges, at month's minds, at trentalls, in abbeys and chantries, besides other horrible abuses which we now see and understand. And now hearken to me! Forasmuch as your

churches are scoured and swept from the sinful and superstitious filthiness wherewith they were defiled and disfigured, do ye your parts to keep them comely and clean: suffer them not to be defiled with rain and weather, with dung of doves and owls, stares and choughs, and other filthiness, as it is foul and lamentable to behold in yonder Abbey. Remember, too, it is the house of prayer, not the house of talking, of walking, of brawling, of minstrelsy, of hawks, of dogs. Provoke not the displeasure and plagues of God, for despising and abusing his holy house, as the wicked Jews did."

Here Christopher would have finished, giving his hearers to understand, that what they had beheld was a token or fore-runner of divine vengeance, for the despising and neglecting of God's house, a not unfrequent theme of admonition from the pulpit in those days; but perceiving that his auditory had now increased to something more than a hundred, and that there were many young persons of both sexes among them, trimly dressed, and inclining to scoff and gibe at his holding forth, he suddenly turned upon them a look of denunciation, and, stretching forth his hands, with much vehemence of manner exclaimed:—

"And you, ye poor gilded worms—ye painted butterflies—bedecked with all that cost and bravery—whose apparel is so gorgeous, that neither Almighty God, by his word, nor yet godly and necessary laws, made of our princes, can bridle you in this detestable abuse—it is ye, and the like of ye, that bring down upon us the wrath of Heaven. I would that each of you fitly beheld and considered your vocation, inasmuch as God hath appointed every man his degree and office, within the limits whereof it becometh him to keep himself; and then you would not look to wear like apparel, but every one according to his degree. Ay, and if this were so, many a one should be compelled to wear a russet coat, which now rustleth in silks and velvets, spending more by the year in sumptuous apparel, than their fathers received for their whole revenue of their lands. But alas! now-a-days, how many may we behold, occupied wholly in pampering the flesh, taking no care at all, but merely how to deck themselves. The Israelites were contented with such apparel as God gave them, although it were base and simple: and God blessed them, that their shoes and clothes lasted them forty years; yea, and those clothes which their fathers

had worn, their children were contented to use after them. But we are never contented, and therefore we prosper not; so that most commonly, he that rustleth in his sables, in his fine furrowed gowns, corked slippers, trim buskins and warm mittens, is more ready to chill for cold, than the poor labouring man which can abide in the field all the day long, when the north wind blows, with a few beggarly clouts about him. *We* are loath to wear such as our fathers have left us; *we* think not that sufficient or good enough for us. *We* must have one gown for the day, another for the night; one long, another short; one for winter, another for summer; one thorough furred, another but faced; one for the working day, another for the holiday; one of this colour, another of that colour; one of cloth, another of silk or damask. *We* must have change of apparel, too—one afore dinner, and another after; one of the Spanish fashion, another Turkey; and, to be brief, never content with sufficient. Our Saviour Christ, bade his disciples they should not have two coats: but the most men, far unlike to his scholars, have their presses so full of apparel, that they know not how many sorts they have. Go to, ye rich men! ye wealthy worldlings! Weep and howl on your wretchedness that shall come upon you!—your riches are corrupt, and your garments are moth-eaten; ye have lived in pleasure on the earth and in wantonness;—ye have nourished your hearts, as in the day of slaughter. Mark, I beseech, St. James calleth such miserable, notwithstanding their riches and plenty of apparel, forasmuch as they pamper their bodies to their own destruction.”

Christopher perceived, plainly enough, that he was rowing against both wind and tide. The younger part of his audience only made merry with his sumptuary denunciations, while those of graver age were not inclined to confess the superior pretensions of a russet coat over a gown of damask, silk, or velvet. They, indeed, whom necessity, rather than godliness, compelled to eschew the enormity of costly gear, seemed greatly edified; but a tailor, who had slipped off his shop-board, to note what was passing while his goose beated, shuffled out of the crowd as fast as his slipshod feet would permit, when he discovered that Kit was railing against frequent change, and much store, of goodly apparel. “Poor, fond creature!” he muttered, as he was making his escape, “talk-

ing of the Israelites wearing their shoes and clothes forty years, and then leaving them off good enough for their children to wear after them. A pretty starving life, a tailor must have had of it in those days, I trow!"

"Yea, marry, and a cobbler too, friend Button," rejoined one of that ancient craft, who was standing hard by, and overheard his neighbour's conclusions.

"Of a truth, ay,"—replied Button, laughing, and brandishing his shears, "he would earn about the same, and not a penny the more, I guess, as Kit Barnes himself would, if horses' shoes lasted forty years, and a second forty to boot."

"By St. Charity," retorted he of the leathern apron, "shoes that *last* after that fashion, would not do for my *last*, unless I was taking my *last* stitch."

These handicraft quips, tickled the fancies of those who heard them, and produced a burst of laughter, which might have disconcerted Christopher, were it not that he was now mounted on his favourite hobby, and was resolved to amble along, no matter whether his road were rough or smooth. Indifferent to the growing symptoms of mirth which he noted, but perceiving that it was much encouraged by the giggling of the women and girls, he, like a skilful orator, seized the incident of the moment, and made it subservient to his purpose.

"Certainly," he continued, "such as delight in gorgeous apparel, are commonly puffed up with pride, and filled with divers vanities. So were the daughters of Zion and people of Jerusalem, whom Esai, the prophet, threateneth, because they walked with stretched out necks, and wandering eyes, mincing as they went, and nicely treading with their feet, that God would make their heads bald and discover their secret shame. In that day, saith he, shall the Lord take away the ornament of the slippers, and the cauls, and the round attires, and the sweet balls, and the bracelets, and the attires of the head, and the slops, and the head-bands, and the tablets, and the earrings, the rings and the mufflers, the costly apparel, and the veils and wimples, and the crimping pin, and the glasses, and the fine linen, and the hoods and the lawns. And what, I pray you, is the vanity that is used among us, in these days? The proud and haughty stomachs of the daughters of England, are so maintained with divers disguised sorts of costly apparel, that there is left no differ-

ence in apparel between an honest matron, and a common strumpet. I know it will be here objected and said, of some nice and vain woman, that all which they do in painting their faces, in dyeing their hair, in embalming their bodies, in decking themselves with gay apparel, is to please their husbands—to delight their eyes, and to retain their love towards them. O vain excuse! Oh, most shameful answer! It is the *reproach* of thy husband thus to say. What couldst thou more to set out his *foolishness*, than to charge him to be pleased and delighted with the devil's tire? Who can paint her face, and curl her hair, and change it into an unnatural colour, but therein doth work reproof to her Maker who made her? As though she could make herself more comely than God hath appointed the measure of her beauty! And as though a wise and Christian husband should delight to see his wife in such painted and flourished visages, which common harlots most do use to train therewith their lovers to naughtiness; or as though an honest woman could delight to be like a harlot for pleasing of her husband! Verily, these be but vain excuses of such as go about to please rather others than their husbands; and such attires be but to provoke her to show herself abroad, to entice others: a worthy matter, truly!”

This was speaking home to the bosoms of many of his hearers; of wittol husbands; of slippery dames; of fantastical daughters; of honest men, whose purses had oft-times been drained for the finery of their wives and daughters, and whose very pockets seemed now to respond ‘ay,’ to the homily of Christopher. Many a female hand itched to clapper-claw the saucy railer; but he saw he had now touched the right key, and continued in it.

“What dost thou by these means, but provoke others to tempt thee? To deceive thy souls by the bait of thy pomp and pride? What else dost thou, but settest out thy pride, and makest, of the indecent apparel of thy body, the devil's net, to catch the souls of them that behold thee? Oh, thou woman! not a Christian, but worse than a Paynim—thou minister of the devil! Why pamperest thou that carrion flesh so high, which sometime doth stink and rot on the earth, as thou goest? Howsoever thou perfume thyself, yet cannot thy beastliness be hidden or overcome with thy smells and savours, which do rather

deform and mis-shape thee, than beautify thee. What meant Solomon to say of such trimming of vain women, when he said, a fair woman, without good manners and conditions, is like a sow, which hath a ring of gold upon her snout, but that the more thou garnish thyself with these outward blasings, the less thou carest for the inward garnishing of thy mind, and so dost but deform thyself by such array? But perchance, some dainty dame will say and answer me, that they must do something to show their birth and blood, to show their husband's riches; as though nobility were chiefly seen by these things, which be common to those which be most vile; as though thy husband's riches were not better bestowed than in such superfluities; as though, when thou wast christened thou didst not renounce the pride of this world, and the pomp of the flesh?"

At this moment, the bell of the town crier was heard, and in an instant, Christopher was left without a congregation. Away they all ran, to hear what was to be proclaimed; and, Christopher himself, girding up his apron, took to his heels as nimbly as the best of them. It was to announce, that his worship the mayor would proceed to the town hall, in half an hour, then and there to have grave deliberation with the good townspeople of St. Albans, upon the best measures to be adopted for inquiring into the causes, and, if possible, preventing the repetition of the fearful prodigy of the preceding night.

At the appointed time, the market-place was filled with the inhabitants, whom the mayor addressed as soon as they obtained admittance into the hall, in an oration replete with civic eloquence. He descanted upon the scene which he, in common with them all, had witnessed; wondered what it could mean; expressed sundry pious and loyal fears, that all was not right in church and state; exhorted them to be watchful of coming events; wandered into superstitious conjectures; and after stating that a minute examination had been made of the interior of the Abbey that morning, to discover if there were any trick or device, but which had ended in nothing, he concluded by propounding the important query, "What shall we do?"

After a short pause, an aged man, of venerable aspect, stood forth. His beard was of a snowy whiteness, his head entirely bald, his air, that of one accustomed to command; and though of somewhat diminutive stature,

there was a calm dignity of manner about him, and a certain stateliness of carriage, which enforced respect. As he advanced towards that part of the hall where the mayor was seated, with a slow and measured step, the people fell back on each side, to open a passage for him. He acknowledged the courtesy by a gentle inclination of the head. No one knew him; he was a stranger in the town; no one had ever seen him till that moment; neither his entrance into the hall, nor his presence there, while the mayor had addressed them, had been observed by any one. He approached to within a few paces of the mayor. There was a profound silence.

"What shall we do?" he exclaimed, repeating the concluding words of the mayor. His voice was unearthly. It struck upon the ear like the scream of the eagle. His eye glared with a ferocious expression as he looked round the assembly, and added, "I pause for reply!"

No one spoke. They gazed upon each other with speechless amazement, and ever and anon, directed their view towards the old man, whose countenance deepened into darker and darker shades of scorn and mockery.

"Is there a man among you," he continued, in the same wild accent, "who has a heart stout enough to pass the Abbey doors this night ere the clock strike twelve, and bide the rest?"

"That man am I!" exclaimed one, starting from the throng, and advancing into the middle of the hall. It was Kit Barnes. "I am the chosen of God, and fear him only, whom with fear and trembling I obey."

The old man eyed him for a moment, then advanced towards him, grasped his arm, and said in a low voice—"I'll meet thee there!" Kit shuddered—his colour fled—he gasped for breath—his knees tottered—and he looked like one suddenly struck with some grievous malady. The people gathered round him,—“Wrench, tear me from that iron hand!” he exclaimed, convulsively, and reeling forward, fell upon the ground.

Terror and amazement were now at their height. They looked around for the old man—he was gone! No one saw him enter—no one saw him go. He was gone!—and none could tell whence he came, or whither he had departed.

In a few moments Kit recovered. “I’ll meet thee there!” he feebly uttered, as he raised himself from the

earth. Then, looking at his arm, and clenching it with his other hand, he added, "an if thou do, this limb shall wither in thy grasp, but I'll beard thee!"

"What made thee quail thus, Christopher?" said Peverell, addressing him; "why, man, thou hast had the falling sickness o' the sudden. He was but a pigmy to thee, but thou didst seem like one planet struck. What may this mean?"

"Meah!" replied Kit, who by this time had regained somewhat of his wonted energy of manner, "it means this,—that I have been in the grip of the foul fiend—Lucifer has beleaguered me. When that imp of darkness laid his hand upon me, a freezing ice stream ran through my veins—my blood suddenly congealed—my very bones seemed to crack and crumble beneath his grasp, as if my arm had been crushed in mine own vice. I would have spoken, but my tongue cleaved to my mouth, while his words '*I'll meet thee there,*' whirled like fire through my brain. My eyes grew suddenly dim, and I fell, powerless as an infant. What it means, I know not, Master Peverell; but, perhaps, I shall be wiser before to-morrow."

"You'll not go to the Abbey to-night?" said Clayton, with a faltering voice and quivering lip.

"Ay, marry will I," quoth Kit,—“With God in my heart, I would go even unto the death—and with his holy book under my arm, I would hold parley with Beelzebub himself. I am a mighty man of body, as is right well known, and fear not man: and for what hap can betide me from other than man, my strength and defence are from above.”

There were few, if any, who cared to dissuade Kit from his purpose. They were all extremely willing that the mystery should be cleared up, provided it was not done by themselves. For the same reason, Kit found no one eager to offer to bear him company: not that he would have accepted such an offer, had it been made, for there was enough of wild enthusiasm in his character to make him covetous of undivided glory in the enterprise he had undertaken. Already he had a foretaste of this glory, when, as the meeting broke up, he saw himself the object on which all eyes were bent, and heard his name passing from mouth to mouth. He felt all the greatness of his unexpected good fortune, which had made him, for the moment at least, the theme of every tongue. He returned

to his smithy, escorted, as it were, by all the principal townspeople; and during the remainder of the day, groups of wonder-loving men, women, and children, gathered round his door, to see the man who had had a swinging squeeze from the foul fiend. But a miracle is worth nothing that does not magnify itself a hundred fold ere it be a few hours old. Long before evening closed in, there were those in St. Albans ready to swear that Kit had lost his arm, and the town hall its roof; the old man having twisted off the one, and carried away the other, as he set out upon his journey, after he had settled his appointment with Kit at the Abbey.



CHAPTER III.

KIT BARNES had the honour of being invited to sup with the mayor, who purposed accompanying him himself as *far* as the Abbey, but no farther. "For," observed his worship, "if you were not to go alone, it might be that you would go upon a thriftless errand; otherwise, I should marvellously like to be with you, just to see what will take place; indeed I would go *instead* of you, only as you offered first, and the old man settled it that he would meet you there, peradventure if I went he might not choose to come at all, especially if he be man, and no unclean spirit, for in that case he might misdoubt me, and fear lest by virtue of my office, I should apprehend him in the queen's name, as a common disturber of her majesty's peace, to the great terror of her majesty's lieges. So mark ye, it would not do for me to appear in the business—else,—but let that pass—I am not vain of tongue, Kit, as there be some braggarts in this town whom I could name; tall fellows in their talk, marry, but pigeon-hearted varlets in their doings. But come, friend, mend your draught; this burnt sack, and these spice cakes will warm your courage—take another cup; the night wears apace, and you'll soon be bending your steps abbeyward."

Kit did not require much pressing to fill his cup again,

or to replenish his trencher. Such dainty fare as burnt sack and spice cakes, fruit, and a pitcher of good ale, which, with other savory cates and rare drinks, were spread upon his worship's board, had never before fallen within his reach. But he spoke only the simple truth, when he declared he needed them not to give him courage. From the moment when he stood forth in the town hall and proclaimed himself ready to "pass the Abbey doors that night ere the clock struck twelve, and abide the rest," down to that when he was sumptuously regaling himself at his worship's, his heart had never once faltered. Nor was it likely it should; for he most devoutly believed he was under divine influence in what he was about to perform, and he longed for the moment when he should be permitted to fulfil his mission. There was enough of fanaticism in Kit's character to have placed him at the head of a sect, if circumstances had conspired to call him to the enterprise. Firm of purpose, sanguine of success, reckless of obstacles, disdainful of peril, and gifted with Herculean powers of body, although of somewhat gaunt appearance, he was a man to stand foremost, and lead others, in whatever lot of life he was cast. Such pre-eminence and distinction, indeed, as lay fairly within his grasp, he had never failed to seize; and humble as was his calling, Kit was one to whom his equals looked up with deference, and whom his superiors recognised as above his condition.

It was now the eleventh hour, and Kit rose to depart. The mayor prepared to accompany him. On leaving the house, they found a considerable number of persons assembled in the street, waiting his coming forth, for it was known he had been his worship's guest. A line of people extended on each side to within a hundred yards of the Abbey; nearer than which, no one ventured to approach. Kit strode along, wrapped up in his own thoughts, while the crowd silently gazed upon him with much the same sort of anxious curiosity that they would have bestowed upon a criminal going to the gallows. As he abruptly turned the corner, which brought him in sight of the Abbey, he cast a hurried glance towards it, not as fearing whatever appearance it might present, but to ascertain whether there was any thing which denoted the kind of trial he was about to undergo. There were only

profound stillness and impenetrable darkness. The mayor's servant preceded them with a lantern; and it was amusing to observe how often he looked behind, to ask, as it were, "How much farther am I to go?" As they proceeded along, the crowd gradually closed in upon them, so that when they arrived at the spot where the mayor intended taking leave of Kit, the whole mass of spectators was congregated in the rear.

"I may as well stop here," quoth the mayor. As he uttered these words, his man nimbly wheeled round, and with due respect stood behind his master; but at such a distance that he could not be suspected of wishing to overhear what passed.

"Ay," replied Kit, "I go alone now. But how shall I get in? Where is the key?"

"By the mass, what a blunder!" rejoined the mayor. "I left it on the table in the withdrawing room. Here! Crab, hie thee back, as fast as thy legs will carry thee, and on the beech wood table, which stands in the bay window, thou wilt find a massy key; bring it hither with all despatch. Fly! Begone!" Crab set off with right good will, well pleased to think that every step he went increased the distance between himself and the Abbey.

While they were waiting, Peverell approached. "Friend Christopher," said he, "I laud your firmness. I would do as much myself, an' I did not think you are singled out for the business. Be of good cheer, man: you know, as I do, that beings of another world have no power over the righteous; and for beings of this world, you have thews enow to grapple with them."

"Mark me, Master Peverell," replied Christopher. "I come to this task at no bidding of my own. I have that within me, which tells me, I am prompted to it by a power which none of us can resist. I believe, yea, verily I believe, that some great purpose of the Most High is to be accomplished this night—and I glorify God that he has manifested his love towards me in this special manner. What you first beheld—and what we all of us beheld last night—was of no earthly origin: it was a mystery of heaven; but whether it betokeneth God's wrath, for some grievous sin committed, or his merciful warning, to save us from the repetition of it, is what I am appointed to disclose."

The chimes now went the half hour, and Crab had not returned. Kit grew impatient, and the mayor, who still stood beside him, evinced sundry signs of a vehement desire to take his leave.

"I must pass the Abbey gates ere the clock strikes twelve," said Kit, in a tone of solemn earnestness.

"And abide the rest!" uttered a voice, in a low whisper, which was audible only to Kit himself.

"Ay, and abide the rest!" he replied, turning round quickly to the side whence the voice proceeded; but there was no person near him.

"Where is he of the iron hand?" said Peverell—"the old man who promised to meet you here?"

"I'll meet thee there!" exclaimed the same voice, which now fell upon the ear of Kit, like a heated blast from a furnace.

"He comes not," continued Peverell.

"He is here," said Kit, in an accent of agony.

"I AM here!" was screamed forth in a voice that all heard: and at the same moment the doors of the Abbey burst open! In the centre stood the old man—billows of blood-red flame rolled about him—in his right hand, the arm of which was bared up to the shoulder, he held a crucifix, which, as he furiously waved it aloft, seemed to stream with fire—he beckoned Kit forward, who, as if seized with sudden delirium, rushed onward, exclaiming, "I come! I come! Jehovah is my spear and buckler!" and in an instant he was seen by the side of the old man. The flames curled around them—dismal yells and piercing shrieks were heard in the air—the doors closed upon them with sudden and tremendous violence—and then all was dark and silent as before!

The first impulse of the people, when this appalling scene presented itself, was to fly from the spot; but before they could move a hundred yards, the sound of the closing doors was heard, which reverberated like a peal of thunder. They looked back and saw that the terrific vision had vanished. Their flight was suddenly suspended, except that of his worship the mayor, who never once looked behind, or stopped, till he got to his own house, where he fairly tumbled over Crab, whom he encountered at the door, and demolished his lantern, besides causing an ugly bump on his head, the consequence of its coming

violently into contact with the wings of a cherub, which formed part of the ornaments carved upon an old oak table that stood in the hall.

Crab, who had run home as fleet as a grey-hound, was returning with the pace of a tortoise; for he had a particular wish to be too late, because he was afraid of being too soon. When, therefore, he was upset, in the way described, by his worship, he had no more doubt in his own mind that Satan himself had broken loose, and was close at his master's heels, than he had that he lay sprawling on the ground: whereupon, he began to roar most lustily, invoking every saint in the calendar to come to his aid, and crawling, mean while, as fast as he could, under the old oaken table, where, when he had securely ensconced himself, he continued to bellow and pray, till the uproar brought the other servants into the hall with lights.

His worship, by this time, had recovered both his breath and his wits, and he now began to revile poor Crab in good set terms, calling him northern tike, bundle of beastliness, a Jack, a lagging knave, and telling him he would present his tallow face to the devil for a candle. Crab's lamentations gradually subsided into something between a snivel and a whine, as he gathered confidence from the presence of his fellow-servants; but it was with a most rueful countenance that he slowly crawled forth, picked up the fragments of the shattered lantern, and finally slunk away towards the buttery with his broken cockscomb. The mayor fancied that he had really some cause for his wrath; in as much as he believed, that had Crab hastened back with the key of the Abbey, there would have been no occasion for the officious interference of the old man, or the goblin with the iron hand, as some had begun to call him. Leaving his worship, however, to his cogitations, over a cup of spiced Canary, which he ordered Bridget Weasell, his housekeeper, to make warm and bring him, and which he quaffed with much eagerness, return we to the Abbey, where strange things were passing.

When the people fled in terror from the awful sights they beheld, Peverell alone remained. He moved not. With his arms folded—his eyes rivetted on the edifice before him—all the energies of his mind bent up to witness whatever might occur, he stood motionless and silent, and

fearing almost to breathe or wink, lest some sound or vision should escape him. About five minutes had elapsed thus, and all remained still and dark within the building. He then drew nearer—paused—listened—nearer still—fancied a low, dirge-like air, as if it were the sound of many voices chanting a requiem over the dead, broke upon his ear; but at so great a distance that it scarcely disturbed the silence of midnight. Anon he beheld—or it was some illusion—a funeral train wind slowly round the Abbey, noiseless and spectral, and pass the portals, which silently opened and closed again! They followed a bier covered with a pall; and on it lay a body, in form and countenance like Kit Barnes; but the form so shrunk-en and so withered—the countenance with such an expression of deeply seated horror on it, that Peverell could not repress the involuntary burst of anguish which escaped from him. At the same moment he perceived, or thought he perceived, a pale light faintly gleaming through the lofty windows, while dusky shadows of unearthly shapes dimly flitted to and fro.

Peverell both saw and heard, as in a dream. At one and the same instant, he seemed to know that these things were, and were not; that he was the sport of a disturbed imagination, and was the living witness of true, but awful mysteries. He was inaccessible to fear, and he was too strong-minded to be superstitious. Even under the circumstances just described, he was as calm, and his pulse beat as regularly, as if he were engaged in one of the most ordinary occupations of daily life. He struggled with, he fought against, he almost spurned, impressions which amounted nearly to conviction, merely because they resembled a delusion so likely to grow out of the situation in which he was placed.

"I will be satisfied," he exclaimed, "if it be possible," and he advanced close to the Abbey door. His hand was raised to strike against it, that he might obtain some answer from within, when suddenly he felt, as though the uplifted arm were cased in ponderous steel; it was benumbed and rigid, and fixed beyond his utmost power to move it. At the same moment a voice, issuing from no human lips, for none were near him, breathed in his ears these words, "Thou fool! why so impatient? THOU ART THE LAST!" As the words, "THOU ART THE LAST!"

were uttered, an icy coldness ran through his blood, his teeth chattered, and his whole body shook as if it were ague-stricken.

Before he could recover from this shock, the bell tolled the first hour of twelve. His arm instantly fell powerless by his side, the freezing tremour ceased, and he breathed once more with perfect freedom. The people, who were still gathered together at some distance from the Abbey, looked towards it with intense anxiety as the hour struck, expecting every moment to behold a similar scene to that which they had witnessed the preceding night. But all they saw was, the gates slowly unfolding themselves, and the figure of Kit Barnes just within, rendered visible by a sort of crimson glow, which fell upon it, rather than by any thing which could be called light. By the same mysterious suffusion, the person of Peverell was now seen for the first time: the extreme darkness of the night having hitherto concealed his movements from the townspeople. Kit came forth, and as he tottered over the threshold, the doors closed upon him by the same unseen agency by which they had been opened.

He came forth, and eagerly availed himself of the arm of Peverell for support. It was the arm that had been palsied, but it was now as well as ever. Kit was strangely altered; not in the sense of saying he looked more pale, or that his eyes were sunken or wild, or that his countenance expressed amazement and horror. All these things were so, and yet it was not these that made the alteration—it was a supernatural, an appalling change. The beholders shuddered as they looked on him. They knew it *was* he; yet there was that about him, which made them, at the same time, doubt his identity. It was as if fifty years of sorrow, and sickness, and age, had passed over him, in one short half-hour. His figure had been always gaunt; but the knitting of his frame was athletic, and his step was firm and elastic. Now, he moved along a bony shadow, his features grim and ghastly, and his step feeble as infancy itself.

The people gathered round him, but spoke not. Peverell first broke silence. In a half-whisper, and in a hurried tone, he inquired what had taken place.

“Ask me not,” said Kit; “I AM FORBIDDEN TO TELL!” His voice had undergone the same awful change as his

person; it sounded in the ears of Peverell more like the howl of the wolf, than the accents of a human being.

"Tut, man!" replied Peverell, with a most impotent effort to be jocular, "what have ye to fear now? You are safe out of the Abbey, and may tell, without dread, what took place while you were in."

"Safe!" exclaimed Kit, in the same wolfish tone, and looking behind him with an air of terror, which was a more expressive answer to Peverell than any words could have been. "Safe! ay, as the felon in the hangman's hands, who feels the halter round his neck!" Then suddenly starting back—"Toads and scorpions! the adder and the snake!" he shrieked forth; "how they crawl and twine round my path, spitting their venom at me! A deep drawn sigh, as if his heart would break, followed. "Peverell," he continued, "I am not mad, am I?" A wild and frantic laugh—a frightful laugh—such as might express a fiend's delight at some unutterable misery to man, burst from him. Peverell shuddered.

"I have seen," said Kit, stopping, and looking fearfully back towards the Abbey—

"What?" inquired Peverell.

The sound of Peverell's voice seemed to recall him to himself. He slowly turned his head, and fixed his eyes upon him—tears gushed from them, and his bosom heaved with convulsive sobs. "One! two! three! four!" he exclaimed, pointing with his finger in different directions, as he paused between each number; "and four to that, and four again—and then—but God is above us, and knows all! ay—four, and four, and four!—the apostles were just so many, and no more. Oh, that my tongue might declare what mine eyes have beheld! that I might name the names of the chosen—that I might prophesy of what is to come!" Then, looking wistfully in the face of Peverell, he added, in a tone of thrilling and indescribable solemnity, "But thou, my friend, thou art the last!"

Peverell started at this repetition of words, which had once already sounded horribly in his ears. "I am the last!" he exclaimed: "I have heard those words before, to-night—what do they import? Tell, if you can."

"On! on!" replied Kit, hurrying Peverell forward. "A funeral pall, which no mortal hand dare uplift, was drawn aside for me! I gazed, and felt the marrow wither

in my bones; my flesh shrivelled up, as thou seest—for I am but the shadow of what I was." Then raising his head, as if addressing himself to some invisible being who hovered above him, he added, "I obey—my lips are sealed for ever."

Peverell forbore to ask any farther questions, but silently accompanied Kit to his abode: the people followed, observing the same silence. They saw that Kit was in no condition, either of body or mind, to be harassed with inquiries; and gradually, they all withdrew to their several homes. When Kit entered his cottage, he threw himself languidly on a wretched pallet which stood in one corner, and clasping his hands together with much fervour, exclaimed, in a voice of exceeding tribulation:—"Why standest thou so far off, O Lord! and hidest thy face in the needful time of trouble?" Then, as if recollecting whose servant he was, while his countenance brightened into a momentary expression of perfect resignation, he added, in a tone of penitent humility, "In the Lord put I my trust—how say ye then to my soul, that she should flee as a bird unto the hill?"

Peverell stood beside him, and watched with deep emotion these paroxysms of mental anguish, if not of mental aberration, which he now began to consider them. Kit seemed unconscious of his presence, and lay in the position in which he had first thrown himself, his eyes fixed and glaring, gazing on vacancy, his hands clenched together, and heaving, every now and then, deep-drawn sighs. Sometimes his lips moved, but no words escaped them; at others, he would pray aloud, or give utterance to fragments of Scripture, all of which were more or less applicable to his own actual state. Once, and only once, he began, or rather attempted to begin, his mysterious numbers; but no sooner had he pronounced one—two—than a sort of convulsive spasm seized his throat, and, in a low, hollow murmur, he articulated, "I obey!"

CHAPTER IV.

PEVERELL was in some perplexity how to act. He could not leave the poor sufferer alone, in his wretched plight, and there was no one to whose care he could consign him for the remainder of the night. Kit had neither wife, nor child, nor kindred of any degree. While he was pondering upon this matter, and had half resolved to go and rouse the inmates of an adjoining cottage, if they had already retired to rest, which was extremely improbable, he thought he heard a gentle tap at the door, and the name of Kit softly called out. The next moment the latch was lifted up, the door opened, and a wild, miserable, woe-begone figure of a woman presented itself. She drew back, as she discovered Peverell, by the dim light of a lamp which was burning on the hearth, and would have retired; but he bade her enter, which she had no sooner done, than he discovered that it was Madge Hopkins, the mother of the poor idiot girl, whose death had so strangely happened on the preceding night.

She looked sorrowfully at Kit, as he lay stretched before her, in the way already described, and addressing him, who heard her not, said—"Is it so, man? Thou hast been fool-hardy for something; the fiend is stronger than thy God—but we are twin mourners now—and I have come to give thee comfort: to give thee that, alas! I have most need of, and must ever need—for my poor Marian is cold and stark—and I dug her grave myself, wo is the day I live to say so! She was a good girl, sir," she continued, turning to Peverell, while the tears streamed from her galled eyes, red with hourly weeping—"she was a good girl, and loved me—more than I loved her, you'll say, or I had not left her to such a fate; but you are wrong: she lived in my very heart; and now she is gone, I feel my heart will soon break. So do not blame me."

"I blame you not, good woman," replied Peverell; "nor should you reproach yourself for that which was the will of Heaven."

"I think I should not," said Madge, wiping her eyes; "but the poor soul loved me so; though she could not speak to tell how much she loved me. Yet *I* could understand all she tried to say; and then her eyes were a better language than the tongue. Each night, before she went to sleep, each morning when she awoke, her arms were around my neck; her warm, pale lips, pressed mine, and her dainty white fingers would pat my cheek or forehead, as if to say, 'God bless you, dear mother, you are good, very good, to your afflicted child!' And I *was* good to her, as far as my means would let me; I was her willing slave, by night and by day—she had been as a cradled infant to me all her life; but I never knew the hour that was weary, except when I was away from her. When she heard my voice—when I called Marian, how her large blue eyes would sparkle, though, at other times, they were dull and cold enough; and when she saw me enter the room, her features brightened so, that no one at that moment would have called her an idiot, from her looks. Ah, Marian! my poor Marian! my foully murdered child!—your eye is colder and duller now!—my voice will not awaken you!—The sight of your neglectful mother will brighten your features no more! But she makes a brave and comely corpse. Belike, you would be pleased to see her, sir," she added, addressing herself suddenly to Peverell; the rest of her wailing and lamentations having been uttered in a sort of mournful rhapsody to herself.

Peverell was about to speak to her in the language of consolation, when a heavy groan from Kit attracted his attention. "I shall hear it again," he exclaimed, in a tone of agony—"I shall hear it again!"

"What?" inquired Peverell.

At that moment, the bell of the Abbey went one. A loud shriek told the rest. It was evident, the wretched man had a kind of presentiment that his ears were about to be invaded by a sound, horrible to his imagination, from the dreadful recollections associated with it. How this prescient faculty existed in him, or by what secret workings it manifested itself, it were vain to surmise. He could not himself have explained the mystery, for he had started forth from a trance, as it were, and knew only what belonged to that first moment of consciousness. The

same symptoms of bodily and mental suffering displayed themselves, as each hour elapsed through the night, with this lamentable difference, however, that as they increased in number, his torments were progressively prolonged.

"How art thou now, friend?" said Peverell, perceiving that Kit was looking round the room, and fixing his eyes first upon him, and then upon Madge, with that sort of vague expression, which indicated that his mind was at work, to connect the past with the present.

"You are well to do," added Madge, approaching him, "with your mad daring. Was it not warning enough to see my poor Marian blasted, but you must have a bout with Satan?"

"How is it with you now?" reiterated Peverell.

Kit raised himself partly off the bed, leaning upon one arm; and looking at Madge, whom he seemed only at that moment to recognise, he exclaimed, "Marian! Marian! Dust, earth, and ashes! Cry aloud, said the Lord to his prophet,—cry aloud to the whole world, that all flesh is grass, and that all the glory thereof is but as the flower of the field; when the grass is withered, the flower falleth away, when the wind of the Lord bloweth upon it."

"Well said!" replied Peverell, (affecting feelings which he had not, in the hope of rallying Kit.) "The fiend has not buffeted all thy wits out of thee, I see. There spoke Kit Barnes again; bear thyself cheerly, man, and defy the cloven hoof."

Kit heard, but was no partaker of Peverell's raillery. His own thoughts were manifestly of a very different character, for casting up his eyes, he ejaculated in a low, but fervent tone of voice, "Father! if this anguish and sorrow which I feel, and death which I see approach, may not pass, but that thy will is I must suffer them, *thy will be done!*" As he uttered the last words, his eyes closed, his hands fell, and he relapsed into his former state of insensibility.

Peverell now addressed himself to Madge, and was proceeding to ask her whether she, or any of her gossips, could keep watch by Kit till the morning, when he was surprised by the sudden entrance of the mayor, accompanied by four or five of the townspeople, among whom was Clayton, and preceded by Crab, with the lantern,

which, like his own head, had been patched and mended in the best way it could. His worship had evidently not been indulging in thin potations; but having been informed, while over his third cup of spiced Canary, not only of what had happened, but of something more—for he was verily assured that Kit had been brought out of the Abbey a corpse—he deemed it a part of his magisterial duty to make instant inquiry into the facts of the case: Hence, his present untimely visit to Kit's cottage.

"Dead enough, poor knave!" he exclaimed, as he looked at Kit, whose appearance certainly did not seem to belie the assertion.

"Dead, indeed!" echoed Crab, who was close at his worship's elbow, and holding up the lantern, so as to throw a stronger light upon Kit's countenance, than what fell upon it from the lamp which was in the room. "He'll never move again, I trow."

"Dead as any he who was buried a year ago," responded Clayton, in a most doleful voice.

A convulsive agitation of Kit's whole frame, at this moment, with a sudden extension of his arms, produced a scene, which, under other circumstances, would have gone nigh to kill Peverell with laughter. Even as it was, it made his sides ache. Clayton fell upon his knees, and devoutly crossed himself, shutting his eyes from sheer fright. His worship made only two strides to the door; but those behind, had made only one; and three of them stuck fast in their several efforts to get out first. As to Crab, it was no joke to him. The lantern dropped first; his jaw dropped next; and then he dropped himself; for down he fell, in as good earnest a swoon as need be; nor was it till the contents of a bucket of water had been thrown over him, that he was restored to his senses. The first use he made of them was, to take to his heels, (in defiance of his master's imperative commands to remain, which he was much too terrified to heed,) and scamper home. In his fright, however, he took a wrong turning, and suddenly found himself stopped by the walls of the Abbey. This mischance was too much for his scared senses. He absolutely roared with terror—implored the walls not to come near him—backed himself from them step by step, till he thought he had got to a safe dis-

tance—and then ran and roared till he arrived at his master's gates.

Meanwhile, Peverell related to the mayor, and those who accompanied him, the manner of Kit's egress from the Abbey—the marvellous changes wrought in his appearance and voice—his wild exclamations—the awful silence which seemed to have been enjoined on him—and all that had occurred after he reached his own cottage. What had befallen himself, Peverell kept to himself; and concluded by observing, “it was quite clear his wits were not sound at that moment.”

“I doubt if they were ever quite in their right place,” quoth his worship. “He always appeared to me to be a little cracked; and, surely, if he were not, he would never have adventured upon the exploit he did.”

“That's as it may be,” rejoined Peverell, thoughtfully. “But there will be time to talk of these matters to-morrow; for talk of them we must, and act in them too. What we now have to do is to see this man duly taken care of for the night—and—”

“I'll watch by him,” interrupted Madge, who had cowered down in one corner of the room when the mayor first entered, and had remained unperceived by him till that moment; “I'll watch by him, till morning—for I cannot sleep now, as I once did.”

“Who is this woman?” inquired the mayor. “One who *was* a mother,” sighed forth Madge, weeping bitterly; as if the recollection of her bereavement had been newly awakened.

Peverell told her story; and his worship coined his pity into a piece of money, which he offered Madge.

“I am poor enough,” said she, “to need this bounty,” looking at the money in her hand: “but wherefore should I? It will not buy yesterday, and Marian with it: and there will be no to-morrow for me, in this world, ere long: so take back your alms-deed,” she continued, restoring to his worship what he had given, and courtesying with great respect. “It is not a proud stomach which returns it, but a breaking heart, that does not want it.”

“Do you think,” said Clayton, in a half whisper to Peverell, “that she is fit to have the care of this man?”

“He will never want more nursing than I can give him, I warrant ye,” replied Madge, who overheard the ques-

tion. Then looking steadfastly at Kit, she added, "The day that sees Marian in *her* grave, will see him ready for his—and me for mine, if God hearkens to my prayers!"

"Where is your daughter?" asked Clayton.

"Where we shall all be, sooner or later, I hope," replied Madge—"In heaven!"

"I mean, where is her body?" rejoined Clayton.

"In bed, now: it will be in a shroud and coffin to-morrow: and i' the earth come next day! But I dressed her clean, head gear and night clothes, and laid her as she was wont to lie, with her arm on my pillow—and she looks for all the world, as if she only slept. But, alas! she is dead. Just so I left her last night, when the foul fiend of the Abbey bore her away and strangled her beneath the north wall."

"And do you mean to leave her all night?" inquired the mayor.

"Leave her!" exclaimed Madge, mingling confusedly in her own thoughts at the moment the event of the preceding night with the object of this question, "Oh, yes, I left her and lost her. I left her for an hour, and lost her—for ever! It was an ill trick of me. But is it *now* you talk of? Oh, she'll bide my return in the morning; besides, her grandam, who loved her almost as much as I did, is there to watch and weep, and I could do no more."

"Well, then," said Peverell, "you will tarry here till I come again, which shall be at an early hour, and before I break my fast."

"Marry will I," replied Madge; "and he shall lack no comfort of tongue or hand the while, if he wake to need any."

They then left the cottage, and Madge, fastening the door, that no latch-lifter might enter, sat her down in one corner of the room opposite to Kit, who lay seemingly in a profound sleep, but whose appearance was ghastly in the extreme. The grim lines of death were imprinted on his face, and his features seemed fixed in that pallid distortion which they wore when he came forth from the Abbey. The blood had forsaken his cheeks and lips, and they were overspread with a livid hue. The bones of the face stood out as if famine had consumed the flesh that once covered them. His nostrils were distended—his mouth

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drawn down, disclosing three or four large discoloured teeth; beneath their closed lids his prominent eyes could be seen, sometimes slowly, at others rapidly rolling to and fro, while his huge bony hands were tightly clasped together across his brawny chest. The lamp that was burning, threw only a partial light upon his countenance and figure, leaving in dark and appalling shadows the greater portion of both. Madge, absorbed as her mind was in her own particular grief, gazed upon this almost spectral object without seeing it, as it were; but once or twice during the night, when he moved and her attention was drawn to him, she was startled at his appearance.

"A word with you, friend," said Peverell to Clayton, as they were proceeding along after they quitted the cottage, and had bade the mayor and others good night. "You and I saw the first of this strange business—we must see the last of it."

"What mean you?" replied Clayton.

"I mean," answered Peverell, "that come what may—but what I would urge will be better done in the broad glare of day. Mine, and thy, spirits are too much disturbed by that which we have seen and heard to address themselves to such a theme at this dreary hour of night. To-morrow, I'll crave your leisure for a matter I have to mention; and so fare the well, friend."

They parted,—Clayton with his thoughts occupied in conjecturing what Peverell could mean, and Peverell himself gloomily brooding over plans which he hardly hoped to accomplish.



CHAPTER V.

BEFORE Peverell had quitted his chamber the next morning, he was informed that a stranger was below who wished to speak with him. "He will not tell his errand," quoth the serving-man, "but he will wait your pleasure."

"What like is he?" said Peverell.

"Of my troth," replied Francis, "I cannot say, except that he be tall enough for a Maypole. He is closely wrapped in a cloak from head to foot; and save a glimpse I had of one of his eyes, which was as fierce as a dragon, and as black as a raven, I did not see so much as a hair of his beard."

"Bid him tarry awhile," rejoined Peverell, "and I'll be with him."

He was not long before he descended into the room where the stranger was waiting. Upon his entrance, he was standing with his back towards him, contemplating with apparent earnestness a painting of the crucifixion which hung over the fire-place. The approach of Peverell roused him from his meditation. He turned round, and with an air of much dignity as well as of courtesy, saluted him. Peverell surveyed him with a hasty glance. His stature was gigantic, but well proportioned withal; and as he strode across the chamber to meet Peverell, the solid oaken flooring seemed to creak beneath his tread. He had suffered his cloak to fall back, and the richness of his apparel denoted a person of superior rank. His entire dress was sable, of the most costly texture, and in his hat waved a lofty plume of ostrich feathers of the same colour. He appeared to be about the middle age of life, but his black hair and beard were flecked with gray. On his ample forehead sat deep thought, while from his large, penetrating eyes, flashed a dauntless and resolute spirit, without, however, any mixture of ferocity.

Peverell was considering how to accost him, when the stranger spoke.

"You are a brave man, friend," said he, "and have in you that quality which makes daring a virtue, raising it above the mere display of sinews and quick passion; therefore, I seek you. It is with such metal great achievements are wrought, and great purposes fulfilled. When you stood alone last night, unmoved and immoveable, while the terror-stricken people fled like hares before the hounds, I marked you out as one fitted to do more in the same cause. You saw me not. How should you? You had eyes and ears only for the wonders that encompassed you. With my cloke around me I surveyed, unobserved, the whole scene, from the self-devotion of the

poor fanatic who rushed on perdition, to the intrepid conduct of yourself, who, unscared by what you had seen, and in the singleness of your own dauntless spirit, which was not thereto impelled by the vain glory of winning applause from your friends or neighbours, for you were alone and in darkness, advanced to the very portals of the sacred building, determined to be satisfied. This was the heroism of the mind. And you were satisfied."

"Of what?" exclaimed Peverell, suddenly. He had, till now, listened to this singular address, delivered as it was, with a graceful fluency, and in a tone of voice, at once grave, prepossessing, and impressive, equally unable to guess its purport, or penetrate the character of the speaker. But an overwhelming thought all at once darted across his mind, and impelled him to demand, with some agitation, of *what* he had been satisfied.

"That **MORE REMAINS!**" rejoined the stranger, with an emphatic solemnity of manner. "That a dark and fearful mystery—whether of god or devil who shall say?—is veiled from our eyes! But be it of heaven, or be it of hell, this is certain—a voice has gone forth commanding that it shall be unveiled. Why else these terrible signs—these tokens of unearthly visitation—these denotements of an invisible power, visibly at work? I have travelled in far countries: the Arab of the desert, the holy anchorite of the rocky cave, and of the deep glen—the priest of the altar—the potent magician—and the seer whose locks have whitened in the search after Nature's most hidden secrets, have lived in fellowship with me—I have seen the might of the prince of darkness, triumph over that of the ministers of the Holy One, who dwelleth in everlasting glory—and I have seen it scattered before his power, like the leaves of autumn when the sharp wind of the north comes roaring from the hills—I have beheld the incantations of the sorcerer vex whole nations with plague, and pestilence, and famine—and I have stood by, while the unclean spirit of the arch fiend has been exorcised and driven out;—the miracles of heaven, and the abominations of hell, have passed before me; but I have never seen—no, nor have my ears heard—that when He who is above, vouchsafes to invite—or he who prowls upon this earth, seeking whom he may devour, dares to defy—it is for man's weal, to fold his arms and cry—'Wherefore

"should I trouble myself?" Nor have I read you aright my friend, if your heart speak not the same language."

Here the stranger paused for a moment; then, laying his hand familiarly on Peverell's shoulder, he added, "And what is he, you would ask, who thus discourses to you?" Peverell bowed his head in assent to this observation.

"Let us sit," continued the stranger. Peverell placed a chair, and seated himself in another, opposite his mysterious visitor.

"I am but a sojourner in this land, and, as my tongue declares, not a native. My name—but there will be another time for ancestry and descent—call me, as I call myself, plain Fitz-Maurice. Do you see this scar?" and he parted his hair on one side of his forehead, when Peverell perceived a crimson transverse mark, with a freshness of appearance as if it were a newly-healed wound. "When I was in Mauritania, now some twenty years since, I adventured my person and my life against a fell magician, who, by midnight spells and potent charms, had power to wake the dead—to make charnel houses yield up their clattering bones, and the deep dug grave its shrouded tenant. The fiendish dwarf, for he was as misshapen in body as in soul, could visit with swift death, too (where his malice aimed at life), by occult sympathies of the contagious air which he infected; or strike the limbs with hideous distortion, foul sores, and wasting disease, by his sorcery.

"This imp of Acheron dwelt in a cave, or den, a mile beyond the city, whose entrance was guarded by a monster, engendered, as it was said, by his necromantic art, from the seed of the serpent cast into the seething blood of infants, (the first born of their parents), during an eclipse of the moon; and kept boiling for nine-times-nine hours, by a fire fed with maidens' eyes. The fairest and the loveliest drooped and died, to make the accursed charm complete. But the wealth of princes, in rare jewels, in precious stones, and bars of unwrought gold; bales of rich silk, dyed in all the colours of the rainbow, and any one of which had been a dowery for an empress; pearls beyond price; aromatic gums, gathered in the phoenix's nest; the essence of an Egyptian mummy, distilled two thousand years ago by a sybil, who, in a prophetic mood,

called it *Yenarkon*, or the 'GIVER OF LIFE,' from its power of bestowing immortality upon whomsoever should obtain it at the peril of life and soul:—these, and the privilege to wive with the noblest and fairest damsel in the country, even though she stood next the throne itself, were offered to him who should slay the magician of the den.

"A largess like this tempted many, but none ever came back to tell of their encounter. Their bones whitened the ground, in front of the cave, and their flesh fattened the monster which guarded its mouth. I was journeying through Mauritania, and heard the things which I have related. I offered myself for the enterprise, and the reward, if I succeeded. My offer was accepted. To tell you how I fared were tedious. I should myself grow weary of a tale I have told through many a summer's day, in bower, in court, and hall, to wondering listeners. Suffice it, that I prevailed. I slew the monster—I penetrated into the den—grappled the dwarf devil by the throat—and maugre his pestiferous breath, which belched forth poison, as he yelled within my grasp, while the surrounding hills rebellowed with his roar, I held him, dashed his talisman to the earth, and then threw his fell carcass from me—a black and strangled corpse.

"In the conflict I received this," pointing to the scar on his forehead: "I know not how or when; I felt no blow—I was conscious of no wound; but there it ever remains, fresh as if done but yesterday—a crimson trophy of my victory I choose to call it. There are times, indeed, when it seems to burn inwards to my brain; but I know how to quench its fires.

"I returned to the city in triumph. The people fell down before me, in an ecstasy of gratitude and admiration. The mighty wealth which I had earned—the wondrous riches that awaited me, I refused—I wanted them not, and they would have encumbered me. I claimed only, and I obtained, the prophetic sybil's elixir, which I ever carry about me. Whether it have the power of bestowing immortality, or whether the deed I performed fulfilled the condition upon which that power depended, must be read in some page that futurity shall open before me."

Peverell listened to this strange narrative with profound

attention; but as he was no believer in magic—no disciple of superstition—he almost began to doubt the soundness of his visiter's intellect. One thing, however, he could not doubt—that Fitz-Maurice himself was perfectly convinced of the truth of all he had related. And, after all, Peverell's scepticism amounted to no more than this, that *he* could not *believe*; not that he denied the possibility, or even the probability, of what he doubted. There is, indeed, in the natural constitution of the strongest mind, a dim and obscure persuasion that the beings of another world *may* have communion with this; that creatures, endowed with faculties totally dissimilar from our own, *may* exist; and that they *may* possess a power to mingle in human transactions, of whose nature and extent we are necessarily ignorant. Hence, the gross superstitions, and brutal idolatries of those rude ages, and of that rude state of society, in which man substitutes his passions, his hopes, and his fears, the things he wishes, and the things he would avoid, for his reason, which teaches him not only what he should wish, and what avoid, but how to regulate his hopes and fears. Hence, too, that portion of superstitious feeling which lurks in every mind; which no mental vigour, no moral or religious discipline, can wholly eradicate; and which makes every man accessible to the influence of mysterious terror, under some circumstances or other.

Fitz-Maurice paused for a moment, and appeared somewhat agitated by the recital of an adventure, which had been attended with such extraordinary incidents. He seemed to penetrate, however, what was passing in Peverell's mind, for he proceeded thus:—

“It is a sharp trial of your faith, I perceive, to digest the things I have told. But go, you, twenty, or twenty hundred miles from this fair tower, and repeat that which thou sawest last night with thine own eyes,—that which thou knowest to be the very soul of truth, however it may o'erpass thy intelligence to expound: would you not find incredulous spirits ready to scoff and gibe? Believe it, there are more mysteries in this world than philosophy can teach the causes of; and he is still a child, who reads only in his own book, and refuses to look into the volume that is opened by another. I will tell thee a merry conceit that happened when I was journeying in the spicy

valleys of Araby the blest. There came a certain man to his neighbour, and said, 'I have seen a miracle!'—'Of what?' quoth his neighbour. 'A camel that did talk.'—'And I,' said his neighbour, 'have seen a greater miracle—a lion swallowed by an ape.'—'Nay, that is impossible,' quoth the other. 'And nay,' said his neighbour. 'You would make an ape of me to swallow your lion; you would fain have me believe what you saw, but deny me your belief for that which I have seen. Remember, henceforth, that he who carries wonders to market, must expect to find others there, with the like commodity to sell.'"

Peverell smiled at this quip of Fitz-Maurice, and observed, that in truth, there was no such denial of faith in him as he supposed; and if there had been, he confessed his pertinent allusion to the events of the preceding night, (putting out of his consideration what he had previously witnessed, of which he, Fitz-Maurice, was ignorant,) was so home a case, that he could not choose but give his credence. "But to what end," he added, "am I now honoured by this visit?"

"To the end," replied Fitz-Maurice, "that thou shouldst approve thyself worthy in the sight of God and man. I am, as I have told you, but a sojourner in this land; and, moreover, a dweller in this place but of a few hours. Therefore, it is not meet, nor would it be so accounted by the people here, that I should stand forward as thou mayest, and as it is fit thou shouldst. At night-fall, yesterday, I entered St. Albans, on my way to the metropolis; and at the hostelry where I rested, hearing the tidings of what had happened, I sallied forth, to be a witness of what was to happen, and noted thee, in the way I have described. Mine own adventure in Mauritania came o'er my mind; and in my heart I said, here is a man to do the like. Did I err?"

"Most certainly not," replied Peverell, with great energy. The dark eyes of Fitz-Maurice sparkled with delight, and his countenance beamed with an expression of gladness, which seemed to say, "It is done! my triumph approaches!"

"You have encountered me," continued Peverell, "in an apt mood for the enterprise you would put me to."

He then related in what manner himself and Clayton

had first witnessed the nocturnal mystery of the Abbey; the occurrences of the following night; the inexplicable presence of the old man at the town-hall; the portentous voice, issuing from unseen lips, which had whispered in his ear, *he was the last*; his fixed, immoveable arm at the Abbéy door; the melancholy plight of poor Kit Barnes, with the spell that seemed to be upon him, chaining his tongue to silence; and, lastly, the pitiful death of Marian, the idiot.

While Peverell was recounting these things, Fitz-Maurice appeared, not as if he were listening to something he had never heard, but as though he were scrutinizing in his own mind the fidelity of what he heard. Once or twice a smile played across his features; but of so peculiar a character, that any one observing him, and ignorant of the matter in discourse between them, might have thought he perceived exulting vengeance subdued, and kept down by doubts and fears. This blended expression was most strongly displayed, when Peverell was describing what had befallen himself, and the circumstances of Marian's mournful fate. Peverell having concluded his little history, added, "Here the matter cannot rest; and I formed the settled resolution last night, before I slept, of proposing some plan, though I hardly know what, for discovering the cause of all these supernatural events, if supernatural they be."

"Methinks," said Fitz-Maurice, "it were well if some certain number—some twelve or so—of the most grave and considerable men in the town, were to unite for that purpose."

"Why, truly," replied Peverell, smiling, "that would be well enough; and, for my own part, I should desire nothing better; but I am right sure there be some of our very gravest, and who are the very top men of the place, that would as lief undertake to swallow your sword, and not make a wry face at it, as come forward to join me in that which I have more than a month's mind to propose."

"And what is that?" asked Fitz-Maurice.

"Why, that I, and as many more as I can persuade to it—for there is bravery in numbers—should take up our quarters in the Abbey to-morrow night, and watch."

"But why not *this* night?" interrupted Fitz-Maurice, quickly. "Let no man trust till to-morrow; it is the

cheat of life—the future that never comes—the grave of many a buried enterprise of noble birth, which, like the lightning's flash, is born and dies, ere the voice of him that sees can cry, behold! Why not *this* night, which is yours, while to-morrow's lies in the womb of time—perchance within the portals of eternity? I, too," he added, "would tarry a single night on my journey, to share with you its wonders or its dangers, if I may be so permitted to do."

Peverell was struck with the impetuous and eager manner of Fitz-Maurice, as he thus urged him not to delay his purpose, and replied, "to-night be it, with all my heart, an' I can prevail with others as easily as thou hast prevailed with me."

"You will prevail," rejoined Fitz-Maurice: "doubt it not. A brave man makes brave men, whom shame keeps from being cowards. But I must away now, for I have much business between this and darkness, that will not wait."

Fitz-Maurice arose to depart. "You shall see me again," he said, as he descended into the hall; "but where, and when? Here? or at the Abbey? And the hour?"

"At the Abbey," replied Peverell.

"As the clock strikes eleven?" said Fitz-Maurice.

"As the clock strikes eleven," rejoined Peverell, placing his hand in that of Fitz-Maurice, which was extended to receive it. "*Alone*, or with others, I will be there; but if *alone*, still I keep my word with you."

When Peverell opened the hall-door, he perceived a richly caparisoned steed, coal black, and decked with sable housings, held by a dwarf, habited in the dress of a page. Fitz-Maurice vaulted on the back of his proud courser, who pawed the earth impatiently, champing the curb, as if in disdain of its control; and in a moment he was out of sight, followed by his page on a palfrey of equal mettle.

CHAPTER VI.

PEVERELL now remembered him of his promise to visit Kit's cottage the first thing in the morning, and calling for his bonnet and staff, he proceeded thither, ruminating, by the way, on the interview he had just had with Fitz-Maurice. "This night," he mentally exclaimed, "that funeral pall which poor Kit Barnes talked of in his ravings, may, perhaps, be drawn aside for me as well as for him. Well! we shall see; but, as I lack his enthusiasm, I do not think, whatever happens, I shall lose either my wits or my tongue, as he has done. I am just in an excellent frame of mind to be fooled or converted: my senses compel me to acknowledge what I have seen and heard; while my reason, with no less compulsion, makes me rebel against my senses. What will be the end of it, lies, as Fitz-Maurice said of his elixir, which is to give him a charmed life, in some page that futurity shall open before me."

As he finished this silent soliloquy, he arrived at the door of Kit's cottage. When he entered, he found several of the honest blacksmith's neighbours assembled, who were alternately condoling with Madge, and pouring forth their unheeded lamentations over Kit. Peverell learned, upon inquiry, that he had slept lethargically through the night, had never once spoken or unclosed his eyes, and could scarcely be said to have moved, except a convulsive agitation of his body, every time the Abbey-bell tolled the hours, as they passed. He had undergone no change in his appearance, save a slight clenching of his teeth, and a livid discoloration of the lips. As to Madge, she looked precisely the sort of being which the imagination of a poet would have created, to watch the dying slumbers of one who was perishing by witchcraft. She might have passed for a familiar of the very fiend, beneath whose wasting power Kit lay subdued. Her haggard countenance, her half-crazed look, her disordered dress, her inflamed and fretted eyes, and that marble apathy of manner, caused by the benumbing quality of her own grief, which had anni-

hilated hope, and therefore denied itself consolation—were all in fine, but terrible accordance with the scene. She seemed already dead in heart and mind;—she spoke to no one—gave sullen and forward answers, when addressed; and some food that had been placed before her by her neighbours she utterly rejected.

Peverell saw that he could be of no service at present. Kit needed nothing; and if he did, there were enow of gossips about him, to take care that he had whatever he might need. He therefore quitted the cottage, not unwilling to escape from the presence of misery which he was unable to alleviate.

He called upon Clayton as he returned, whom he found at breakfast with his dame. He was cordially invited to partake with them, and he willingly took his seat at their board.

“What is to become of us all, Master Peverell?” quoth good-wife Clayton, breaking silence. “I would that thee and my husband here, had been in your beds, as be-shrew you, ye ought to have been, or ere you were the first to see and report what you have.”

“Ay, dame,” replied Peverell, “and if I had had a bedfellow as well as a bed, like my friend, who knows but we should both of us have made better speed from Dunstable? Your bachelor’s bed is only for sleeping in, and I never care to seek my pillow till it be past midnight. When it is high summer, indeed, I seldom shut my eyes before the cock opens his.”

“You are bookish, friend,” observed Clayton, “and read o’ nights, when other men dream.”

“I bless my stars,” exclaimed his wife, “that I can neither read nor write.”

“The more’s the pity, Kate,” added Clayton, “for then, peradventure, thy tongue would sometimes rest, which now serves thee for pen and book.”

“But how do I use my hands, you gag-tooth Jack?” quoth Madam, and bent her brows wrathfully, “I can brew,—”

“Marry can you,” interrupted Peverell, slyly, “and good ale, too; that’s as fit for a churching, as a cudgel for a cursed quean.”

“Yes,” continued the offended dame, determined to go through the whole catalogue of her good qualities as a

housewife; "and I can bake, make butter and cheese, spin and card, sow, and have, besides, some skill in my needle, as our napery can show; and which of these be not better than reading or writing, I would fain learn?"

"Ay, which, indeed," responded Peverell; "and so I warrant ye, says your good man, as often as he drinks your ale, or eats your cheese, or wipes his face with a napkin. Do you not, Master Clayton?"

Clayton, whom long experience had taught how to lay a storm, when he had unwittingly raised one, as he had done in this instance, chucked his wife under the chin, and said, "Get thee a mate, Master Peverell, when thou wilt, and thou shalt still wish she were like my Kate. Kiss me, wench; by my troth, I meant not to flirt or fromp thee."

It happened with Dame Clayton as with some others of her sex: she could better brook to be told of what she did badly, than to be taunted with what she could not do at all. It was, in truth, no great matter of reproach to her that she could neither write nor read, for many a proud and mincing she, who trod in courts and castles, and had fair knights of chivalry to wear their favours, were no better taught. But whether it was that the wind blew from a wrong quarter, or that there had been some previous demonstrations of conjugal civil war, which the arrival of Peverell had suspended, so it was, that when her husband held out the flag of peace, and approached to ratify the treaty, she scornfully repulsed him saying, "You shall know, I'll have my lips as much at liberty as my tongue; the one to say what I list and the other to touch whom I like;" and moreover she muttered something about the "churl's breath smelling so strong, that she cared as much for kissing him as for looking on him."

This little matrimonial interlude had driven clean out of the good-wife's head that which had been uppermost in it for the last two days; and it was not till Peverell, turning to Clayton, told him he had been that morning to visit Kit Barnes, that she remembered she ought to be frightened.

"I do not think the poor fellow will live," said Peverell.

"I thought he was dead last night," replied Clayton,

"and just when I thought so, he gave a kick with one of his legs, as lustily as a Hercules."

"Yes," rejoined Peverell, laughing heartily at his recollection of the scene which followed, "I hardly know who quaked most—you, his worship, or Crab."

"I was sore afraid, I do confess," said Clayton; "not because I found him alive, but because I expected to find him dead: it was the suddenness of the thing that scared me. Give me time to collect my courage, and I have as much of it as any man."

"Well, then," quoth Peverell, gravely, "you will have all the time you can require, between this and eleven o'clock to night."

"For what," inquired Clayton.

"To collect your courage and go with me to the Abbey."

"To the Abbey!" ejaculated Clayton.

"To the Abbey!" echoed his wife.

"Ay," said Peverell, calmly, "to the Abbey, and into the Abbey, and there to watch till dawn, if need be."

"Husband!" exclaimed Dame Clayton, pathetically, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, "do you wish to make a widow of me?"

Clayton had never felt more inclined in all his life to be a tender and affectionate husband, and avoid any thing which might give his dear spouse pain, than he did at that moment. Yet he was no coward, in the general meaning of that term. Give him day-light, a good cause, and a tough cudgel, and he would be found at the end of a fray, where he had first planted his foot at the beginning. But he was no Fitz-Maurice, to dust a magician's jacket: and all the maidens' eyes in England might have been used for fuel, ere he would have brought his nose within sight of the goblin who had a fancy for such a fire. Still, he could not stomach the idea of acknowledging so much of his fears, as would have kept him out of danger; and still less could he bring himself to say to Peverell, you may go, but I will not. He knew his friend to be a man of resolute mind, but not of foolish daring: and the inclination of his heart was, to confess, that what Peverell himself would engage in, was what no man could decline, and swear by his courage afterwards.

"Do you mean to go?" said he, addressing Peverell.

"Most certainly."

"And alone?" rejoined Clayton.

"Not as I hope," replied Peverell. "*You will accompany me; and it shall go hard but we, setting thus the example, will find others ashamed to say us nay.*"

"Yes," interposed his wife, sobbing aloud, "and you will all come out dead, like that poor lout, Kit Barnes. What have you to do with the devil's pranks, when he chooses to play them? The bishops ought to be sent for to drive him out of the Abbey, and bring some holy water with them. He can't abide the sight of holy water, and they could get enough, I warrant, to wash the whole Abbey, so that he could not find a spot whereon to put his hoof, without scalding it worse than if it were dipped in boiling lead. I wonder the mayor does not know that, and send to the Archbishop of Canterbury."

Peverell could not refrain from smiling at this notable scheme of the good woman, for dislodging Satan from his quarters, although his mind was occupied, at the time, with thoughts of a much more solemn kind. Clayton, meanwhile, contented himself with comforting his spouse, by assuring her that in whatever he did, he would take especial care not to put his life in jeopardy; and by reminding her that there was a huge difference between going, as Kit did, in company with that little old devil, who was sure to be an overmatch for him, and going as he should, with Peverell, and two or three hundred more; for he was determined to stipulate beforehand for a sufficiently numerous company.

"It is agreed, then," said Peverell, "that we go together."

"Yes," replied Clayton, after a pause. "But how many," he added, "do you think the Abbey will hold, because we may as well have it full?"

When his wife found that neither her tears nor her expostulations were likely to succeed against Peverell's influence over her husband, she withdrew, with somewhat more of the manner of a woman vexed, because her will prevailed not, than of a wife sorrowful at the thought of becoming a widow.

"Now we are in private," said Peverell, "I'll impart to thee matter that shall weigh greatly, peradventure, in

fixing your resolution. We are *not* alone in this business, I can tell thee; and we *shall not* be alone."

Peverell then related to Clayton all that had passed between himself and Fitz-Maurice; and at the conclusion, observed, "Keep this in thine own breast, for the knowledge of it may work clean contrary to that which is our purpose. That Fitz-Maurice will be there, I dare avouch upon my oath, let who may come likewise; but it is not equally certain that others will offer their presence so readily, an' it be known another stranger is to appear; for they will have the notion in their heads forthwith, that he is a second goblin with the iron hand."

Clayton accepted the secret, and pledged himself to silence. But his thoughts still ran upon a goodly company of adventurers in this business, and he again asked Peverell, if he expected a great crowd?

"Tut, man!" replied Peverell, "the fewer the better. If there be real danger, a few will still be too many to have peril thrust upon them; and if there be none—as, by my soul, I think there is not—why, then, half a dozen resolved hearts will not infect the imagination with idle terrors, out of which the phantom danger is so often shaped."

Clayton was any thing but convinced by this species of argument. He felt, for his own part, that he would rather be frightened by any body, and laugh at the jest afterwards, than have nobody with him, when he *was* frightened, and nothing at which to laugh. The more the merrier, was his maxim, whether it was to junket or to funk it, and could he have had his will, there should not have been an able-bodied man in St. Albans on the outside of the Abbey, that night, after the clock struck eleven. However, he could not urge the matter any farther; but in the way of a slight consolation to himself, he put his wishes into the shape of an opinion, and declared, that he "should not wonder, when the time came, if every body went."

"We shall see how that may be," replied Peverell, carelessly; "but now, methinks, the first thing to be done is to repair to his worship, and have some consultation with him. Will you along with me?"

"Ay, surely," said Clayton, and forth they sallied.

The mayor had but just risen when they arrived at his house. The combined effects of much fright, much spiced

sack and Canary, and an inordinately late hour in going to bed, had made him court his pillow greatly beyond his usual time.

"Clayton and myself," said Peverell, after some customary salutations had been exchanged, "have agreed to watch in the Abbey this night; and as we were the first who saw and bruited about these marvellous appearances, perchance we may be the last whom they will trouble."

"Oh, dear!—oh, dear!" groaned forth a voice in the room, in a tone of unaffected surprise and dismay. It was Crab, who was standing behind his master's chair, and who was utterly unable to repress this audible expression of his feelings, at hearing what he considered such a tremendous purpose avowed.

"Hold thy peace, thou brawling varlet!" said his worship. Then, turning to Peverell and Clayton, he added, "Thou dost well, I think; and whatsoever I can do to render thee service in the undertaking, thou mayest freely command."

"We do not reckon upon going alone," said Clayton; "and I am of opinion, if your worship were to make proclamation to that effect, every man in the town would accompany us."

At these words, Crab recollected something he had to do in the kitchen, and stole incontinently away, lest he should be invited to make one of the party. His worship also looked grave from some kind of similar misgiving, and began to mutter something about "wishing he were a younger man; but that at his time o' life, night-watchings were sore trials, and how shaken he felt that morning from being out of his bed full four hours beyond his custom of retiring to rest."

"Master Clayton," said Peverell, (resuming the matter where he had left it, without adverting to the mayor's prudent self-disqualifying remarks,) "is for making a town's affair of this business. Now I am not; and for two reasons—the first, and most sufficient one, because I am certain, from what I have observed, there are not twenty men in it whom the love of lucre even would tempt to the enterprise: the second, because I want cool heads, stout hearts, and discreet tongues; and neither are there twenty of those, I take it, in the town. If some half dozen or so of such as I have described, could be

brought together, I am free to confess I would rather have fellowship than not in the thing."

"Some half dozen!" replied Clayton; "you shall as soon prevail upon some sixty as upon six; and why not give every man the fair choice of showing his zeal, if he list?"

"With all my heart," said Peverell. "I would give every man his fair choice, but no man his command. He who offers freely, is he whom I would specially pick out from the many. But how shall we arrive at the knowledge of such?"

"I have it!" quoth the mayor; "I have it!" patting his forehead in approbation of the wisdom that was within, and erecting himself, in his chair, into an attitude of abundant self-complacency. "I will cause proclamation to be made in the market-place, at three several hours, of thy design, and invite all those who have a stomach thereto, to send me their names before sun-down. This shall try the mettle o' the people, and moreover, obtain for thee the co-mates thou desirest, or pardie, leave thee to thine own devices, unclogged by recreant spirits."

"I like thy proposal well," said Peverell, after a pause; "let it be just so: but tempt with no lures; let there be no flourish of words or of matter—no cunning phrases of courtesy—no gentle terms of sugared entreaty; but a blunt, naked, and brief proclaiming of the thing that is; and let the stream run which way it will."

The matter being thus settled, Peverell and Clayton soon after took their leave of the mayor.

As they were proceeding along, Clayton, whose thoughts were still harping upon the number of persons who might join them, and who would have used as many sugared words as the language could supply to augment that number, with a purse of money into every man's pocket to boot; if he had had a purse of his own long enough to do it, addressed Peverell:—

"Thou hast no wit, friend," said he, "to win men's hearts against their judgment. A cunningly devised speech i' the town-hall, from thyself or from his worship, would have mustered a regiment; but for a cold 'you may if you like'—who will thrust his head into the fire, at such a frosty invitation?"

Peverell laughed aloud; and taking Clayton by the arm, replied, "I will tell thee one thing, friend;—I never knew a heart, won by stealing away the judgment first, which

was worth the winning, be the thing it was wanted for great or little. A resolve founded upon a mere gust of passion, as it is suddenly puffed up, so it is as suddenly puffed down; but born of the mind, it lives or dies with that which doth beget it. Women and children are coaxed into daring: but your man, who has nature's stamp to engage in perilous deeds, only wants the opportunity, and never waits to be invited."

Clayton was once more foiled, by the plain, hard truths of Peverell, who having no covert object to reach, went the straight road to that which he really sought; while the other, having two meanings for every word he spoke, would fain have travelled two roads at once, like a river divided in its course by a rocky islet. He resolved, however, to give up the point, as far as Peverell was concerned: but he silently determined, at the same time, to consume the whole day in trying what he could do himself towards multiplying the visitors to the Abbey.

The mayor, mean while, directed that the proclamation should be made in the way he had suggested, and it was done accordingly. The people assembled each time—listened—shook their heads, and went away. At the concluding words of the notice—"Whoso shall be moved to take part herein, let him now declare himself, or before six of the clock, notify his willingness unto the most worshipful the mayor of St. Albans," not a voice replied, "I am one!"

When Peverell heard of this, he only smiled, and observed, "Why should they pay to act, when they can see the show for naught? If a man wilfully strap a heavy burden on his own back, must his neighbour perforce do the same?" But Clayton took it not so evenly. "It is a foul shame," he exclaimed, "that there can be found only two noble spirits in all this ancient and famous town when the time calls for a hundred. 'T were a good deed, in my mind, to let the cowardly knaves be buffeted by Satan, an' they will not look after their own bodies. Why should Peverell and I peril our lives and limbs for such frightened sheep? Sheep do I call them! I wish they may not be cunning foxes, who craftily keep their holes, while the devil is out a hunting with his long-tailed pack."

Matters turned out, however, much better than Peverell expected, and, of course, not so bad as Clayton was

prepared for. Before the day had fairly closed, his worship had a list consisting of ten names: the number of individuals having volunteered their services. It appeared, too, that each of the ten had acted from separate motives, holding no previous communication either with Peverell or Clayton, and equally ignorant of the intentions of the rest. Peverell was abundantly satisfied: but Clayton thought it very likely there would be ten more by eleven o'clock.

The names of these ten, (for they had no addition to their number) were as follow: Benjamin Lacy, Wilfred Overbury, Hungerford Hoskyns, Richard Vehan, Philip Walwyn, Walter Wilkins, Owen Reece, Nicholas Mortimer, John Wintour, and Roger de Clare.



CHAPTER VII.

THE house of the mayor was the place appointed for the assembling of these persons, and about nine o'clock, Roger de Clare arrived. Peverell and Clayton were already there; and had been examining the list of their fellow adventurers. The name of De Clare caught Peverell's eye.

"What!" he exclaimed, "the moody, humorous, and splenetic Roger, one of us? What peevish fit hath driven him into our company? He shall be welcome, however: for his keen and bitter railing against the world and all that is in it, the court, the city, the cottage and the camp, will make us sport, albeit he hath no mirth in himself. De Clare is one," continued Peverell, "who looks disdainfully upon the world, with a pair of lean cheeks, like a winter grasshopper, after harvest. He will digest his own venom till he is sick, and then vomit it forth, to fall where it may. He is never ill but when he hears of another man's advancement; and never so well as when a famine crams the gorge of a hungry church-yard. His blood is so mixed with gall, that it is as yellow as the leaf in autumn. His discontented spirit is ever on the wing

in quest of food, and ever finds, or makes it: for be it peace or war, dearth or plenty, he extracts from it the subtle essence of misanthropy: nay, for lack of nobler matter, he will e'en rail at the last fashion, or quarrel with a costermonger about the market price of salt butter. He is, in fact, the very abstract of Pandora's box; but hope lies at the top, instead of the bottom with him: the hope that all which remains behind will come out in his time."

Peverell had scarcely ceased, when De Clare entered. His appearance was an exact personification of all that Peverell had said. His lank figure, his sallow cheek, his moody brow, and the cold malice of his curling lip, proclaimed the cynic, whose tongue never wagged but to frame words of churlish invective. The mayor, Peverell, and Clayton, received him cordially.

"I am come," quoth he, "to know how many fools this town can furnish besides ourselves. If there be only four," he continued, glancing round the room, "let her majesty's council look to it; we shall be no tax-payers, nor breed sons for the wars, either by sea or land; no, nor be governed like the rest of her liege subjects."

Clayton could have found in his heart to say *amen*, to this sally of De Clare, for as the hour grew nearer, his conviction grew stronger, that it was, indeed, a foolish matter; or, at the least, an exceeding folly, in him to play the part he did. However, he held his peace.

"That company which has De Clare in its circle, must needs be a goodly one," said Peverell, with an ironical smile.

"No more," retorted De Clare, "than a diamond, dropped among pebbles, imparts to them its brilliancy or value. They are its foils only. An honest thought in a knave's mind, purges not hence all that is foul and vile; it flees rather itself from such base companionship."

"Then, by this trope," replied Peverell, "I conclude we are to lose thee."

"Not so, either," said De Clare. "When a man once sets out upon a journey, he will not turn back because he finds the roads dirty, or cannot choose his fellow-travelers. He must keep his own house who is determined always to have a picked friend for his fireside. I came here

to laugh by the hour, at a fool's wonder, and shall not return to laugh only at myself."

"Well," observed his worship, "there be others to laugh with you, or for you to laugh at, as it may chance. Here are nine, besides yourself, consenting to be partakers in this enterprise."

De Clare ran his eyes hastily over the list. "Ha! ha! ha! Nicholas Mortimer! Oh, the gods! that this thing of tissue and velvet—this silken worshipper of the world's bravery,—this mincing outside of a man, in his trim buskins and corked slippers—this leaden sword, in a rich scabbard—this cinnamon tree, whose bark is more worth than his body—should thrust his spruce mustachios, and well-oiled beard, any where but into a lady's face! Do you know this gallant?" he continued, addressing himself to Peverell. "He hath read the book of good manners; and hath purchased legs, hair, and beauty, more than nature gave him. He is your perfect salamander—lives in the flames of love, and sighs sweetly, for his breath is perfumed. He is judicial only in tailors and barbers; he studies positions before a mirror, and what simper best displays two rows of ivory teeth. He has travelled too;—will choke rather than confess beer good drink, and his pick-tooth is a main part of himself. Why, he will call for his best furrowed gown, ere he lets the night air breathe upon him in the dog-days—and he to come abroad at this time o' the year, to brave the nipping winds, and shiver between four stone walls at midnight! Oh, he hath made a rash vow to his mistress, whose forlorn hope is to make worms' meat of him, by a catarrh or a quinsy! This quacksalver," continued De Clare, "will sort well with some whom I see here. Ay! Vehan, and Philip Walwyn: place *them* side by side with Mortimer, and what have ye? A palpable trinity, but no unity—mind, soul, and body—poor Monsieur Mountebank being the rotten case only.

Peverell, who relished the caustic touches of De Clare, and his bitter humour in dissecting the characters of his friends, lured him on, by the sly display of a disposition to defend them, to portray those of Vehan and Walwyn.

"They are due north and south," said he; "in fixed and everlasting opposition. Vehan lives in an atmosphere

of sighs of his own breathing; and his imagination is so infected with the spirit of melancholy, that he turned away his fool for laughing at one of his own jests, with such contagious and overflowing merriment, that Vehan himself felt the shadow of a smile growing upon his lips. He accounts the grave-digger your only good companion, because he talks of his trade, and that appertains to coffins and dry bones, shrouds and charnel houses; while he himself is a living *memento mori*. If you would seek him when he is from home, you must go to the next shady grove, in whose bosom a rivulet dwells, which he ever augments with his tears. He is all contemplation, no action; and as he only thinks of business, but never does any, winding up his thoughts, which unwind of themselves, like the motion of a dial, 'tis an even chance he is in his bed at this moment, dreaming of what was his intention an hour ago. But herein is my slender hope of him, that if he come at all, it will be because the owl is abroad, whose company he doth solemnly affect, when the moon bends her pale bow in the heavens, as it does now.

"Philip Walwyn and he are kinsmen; but through whatever channels their blood may have mingled, their minds stand off from each other, like men committed to a mortal combat, which they would both fain avoid. Walwyn is no day-dreamer, as Vehan is. He has the tongue of common rumour in his favour, for one who has wedded his experience to his reason, and whose actions are the comely offspring of this marriage. He seeth the end before he shoots; circuits his intentions, and calls not the varieties of the world chances. Men are *his* instruments, not *he theirs*; and he uses them with so skilful a knowledge of their several qualities, that, like the alchymist, he transmutes them to that precious metal wherewith his bags are reputed to be well stored. He is no gamester of the world, but makes the world his game, which he plays with so much prudence that he rarely loses the stake he throws for. He is a sun to ordinary men, whose clear course directs their steps in a regular motion. Why he is here," continued De Clare, pointing to the paper he held in his hand, "is past my wit to fathom; but as I know his understanding is ever the pioneer of his feet, so am I assured he comes not in vagrant chase of the bauble curiosity."

"If you are puzzled to explain the motive of Walwyn's presence," said Peverell, "I am no less perplexed with that of mine host of *The Rose*, honest Jack Wintour, who neither eats nor drinks but at other men's charges and appointments. That merry laughing eye of his shall lose its roguish twinkle, methinks, an' he have to do with any other spirits to-night than those which he keeps under lock and key in his own cellar."

"Wherefore doth a vintner hang out a sign," replied De Clare, "but to catch the eye: and wherefore, I pray you, doth this round-bellied thing of double beer and fellowship, climb into our fold, but that he may live to tell the adventure o'er many a stoup of good liquor, and live the better too by the telling of it."

"I protest," exclaimed Clayton, "there is that flap-dragon of a fellow, Owen Rees, who swears by his ancestry, like a man of pedigree, and never sees a goat, or smells toasted cheese, but he wishes the queen were no virgin, that so we might have a chance for a Prince of Wales. He is the most choleric braggart, in his absence be it spoken, (which I would not tell him to his teeth, out of regard for mine own) that ever left the barren mountains of his native Wales, to browse in the fat plains of merry England. His blood courses through his body like so many trains of quick gunpowder, to the which his eyes and ears serve as matches; it is a look, a word, and an explosion!"

"And yet," quoth Peverell, "fire-brand as he is, honest Owen is the oyster which contains the pearl, for a man may be picked out of him. Boldness he accounts a sovereign virtue; and prides himself upon his own stock of it. I grant he speaks pedigrees naturally, and will allow none to be well descended that call him not cousin. Owen Glendower he prefers to Rhysap-Griffin, and vouches Welsh a pure and unconquered language. He stands in no small estimation with himself—"

"Yes," interrupted De Clare, "and upon St. David's Day he is without comparison. An' this were that day, I would as soon beard a famished tiger in his lair, as this son of Cadwallader."

"Here be two names," said the mayor, "of whom, marvellous it is to say, I know nothing. I have lived, man and boy, in St. Albans, any time these fifty years,

and half a score nearly to boot, and thought there was no one in the town who could say 'good morrow,' or doff his cap to me, and I look strangely at him; but it is not so; for I protest, by my office, that if the high sheriff called upon me to produce the bodies of Benjamin Lacy, and Wilfrid Overbury, I should have to write *ignoramus*."

"Wilfrid Overbury," said De Clare, musing; "I seem to remember me of such a name;—ay, he lives hard by mine own dwelling, i' the house that was Sir Hubert de Falconbridge's, where the foul tragedy of the old man's murder was so lamentably perpetrated in the last reign, and which has nearly gone to decay since, simply because our wise geese have put it under the ban of blood. They tell of grisly phantoms, and dismal noises over the winter's fire; and the benighted hind, as he trudges homeward, looks askance at the lonely walls, and peoples them horribly with his own fantastical fears. It is a brave mansion still; and there lives Wilfrid Overbury, who came thither with the swallow, but departs not with it."

"What is he?" inquired Clayton.

"I can rather tell thee what he is not, than what he is," replied De Clare. "He *was*, as I have learned, a pirate—a water pirate, for we have such sharks on land, and *is* a sort of man-devil, for being ashore hath not softened the ruggedness of his heart engendered by his calling. He lives in his house, as it were that narrow prison, his ship; and though he has left off filching as a vocation, there is one thing he would fain steal yet, if his troubled conscience would let him—a sound sleep. His appearance proclaims the thing he has been—a perpetual plague to noble traffic, the hurricane of the deep, the earthquake of the exchange, and the book by which merchants reckon up their losses. Although his grave hath been always yawning before him, he cannot tell you what the inside of a church is made of. He is so rough-hewn—such a piece of caulked and tackled humanity, that he seems fitted only to dispute with tempests. Neither a rock, nor a quicksand having plucked him while he was ripe, he hopes now to escape restitution, and be buried at last in a churchyard with your honest Christian. As to Benjamin Lacy," continued De Clare, turning to the mayor, "I know him not, and must, therefore, leave you in the sheriff's hands, to deal with your worshipful ignorance as he listeth."

At this moment they were joined by Walwyn and Vehan, who were followed the next instant by Owen Rees. Vehan looked as if a statue of melancholy had stepped off its pedestal. Without uttering a word, he coldly saluted those who were present; then, throwing himself into a chair, which stood in a distant corner of the room, he gently crossed his legs, folded his arms, and dropping his head upon his bosom, heaved a deep-drawn sigh, and sank into silent meditation.

Walwyn entered with an air of free and open courtesy, shook each man by the hand, wore a frank smile upon his countenance, and in a cheerful tone of fluent cordiality, ran volubly through the customary greetings. It would not be easy to imagine a more powerful contrast than between him and his kinsman. They were, indeed, as De Clare had characterized them, "due north and south, in fixed and everlasting opposition." Vehan seemed to withdraw from man, as if he *could* have no communion with him, while Walwyn grew to him at once, as if it were essential to his very being, that there should be instant fellowship between them.

As to the fiery little Welchman, he came in as though he had been discharged from a musket, and required five minutes or so to put himself in order. He was all splutter and bustle; shook hands with two at once, nodded to two others at the same time: looked as terrible as his own pistol at full cock, and as fierce as a commander in the wars.

When this combustible descendant of Rhysap-Griffin had sufficiently evaporated to allow of his standing still, the discourse among those now assembled, naturally turned towards the cause of their assembling.

"Well, gentlemen," said Walwyn, "and so we are the seven wise men, who are to enter the lists with the foul fiend of the Abbey?"

"I crave your pardon," interrupted the mayor; "but you are to reckon without your host, and so keep to the adage; nevertheless, you will have a trim reckoning, I can assure you, for there are six more beside myself. I lament sorely that my years and growing infirmities are such a bar to my inclinations."

"Why was not I my elder brother?" silently ejacu-

lated Clayton; "he is comfortably rolled up in flannel, with a new fit of his old sciatica."

"Oh, thou reverend impostor!" exclaimed De Clare, with a contortion of the mouth, which was intended for a smile of jocularitv. "Why, thou knowest in thy heart, that ere thou sleepest to-night, thou wilt bless Heaven for thine age and thy aches, which have thus befriended thee."

"Who are our remaining comrades?" inquired Owen, addressing himself to the mayor, who was about to rebuke De Clare, with much gravity, for the license of his speech. "Are they known men?"

"Not all, I believe," quoth the mayor; "for we were e'en now taxing our memories, when you entered, touching one Benjamin Lacy, whose name is here."

"Benjamin Lacy," said Walwyn, "I know him well, and know him for as gallant a soldier as ever drew his sword in battle. Nor is his valour his only merit; for he had rather save one of his own men, than kill ten of his enemies. He hath achieved glory, I can tell you, in the wars, and yet he never thought his body yielded a more spreading shadow after a victory than before it. He is no thrasonical braggadocio, and when he looks upon his enemy's dead body, it is with a kind of noble heaviness, a brave man's sorrow, not with insulting exultation. I have heard from those who have served with him, and under him, that as he is ever the first in giving the charge, so is he the last in retiring his foot. In the field, he is the bright example from which they all take fire, as one torch lighteth many; modest in the hour of triumph, he hath learned not only how to win a victory, but how to use it. He is the man, of all others, whom it had been well to choose for our head in this business; for he will not be for sounding a retreat till he has fairly made the enemy capitulate."

"Bless his bravery!" exclaimed the Welchman; "I honour him in my heart already, as much as if the blood of my great ancestor, Owen Glendower, trickled in his veins."

"Ay, or the milk of your great grandmother had trickled from the lips of his great grandfather!" exclaimed De Clare. "One would be just as good a claim as the other, to your love. Men do not inherit the virtues of

their ancestors with their wealth and titles; and 'tis well they do not, or we should be overrun with hereditary honour, till low-born greatness would die for sorrow, to see its twin elder brother jostle it aside by the prerogative of a name."

"Owen Glendower," retorted his fiery half-namesake, with scarlet cheeks and angry eyes, "Owen Glendower was—"

"A very valiant Welchman," interrupted De Clare, calmly; "a very valiant Welchman, I say; but what of that? Your mountains breed every year men as valiant."

"Yes, truly," replied Owen, wonderfully cooled down by the adroit answer, and quiet manner of De Clare.

"Then why," continued De Clare, "commit such an outrage upon our common mother, Dame Nature, who distributes her gifts among her children with so liberal a hand? Respect no man for the honour of his blood, but simply for his own honour; 'tis the birthright of many a knave to write himself noble; but it is the glorious privilege of ourselves only, to become so."

"What!" exclaimed the other, "is it worth nothing to be born of ancestors who were illustrious in their lives, and glorious in their deaths?"

"Yes," answered De Clare, "it is worth every shilling of the rents that still stick to the honour, and no more. Ancestry!—foh!—will it keep thee? will it give thee meat and drink? will it put a good furred gown upon thy back, to repel the winter's cold? An' you could coin your noble blood into nobles, indeed, a plethora of nobility would be a disease to covet. Say you kill your neighbour in an unjust quarrel; will your pedigree save you from the gallows? Plot treasons against the crown; will it keep your head upon your shoulders? Contract more debts than you can pay; will pedigree wipe them out, and give you quittance of them? Or, smirch your reputation with any blot that may not beseem an honest man, and will it compel the world to wear a smiling face towards you, if you cannot gild your vices as well as act them? Nay, will your poor descendant of a rich house, whose coat proclaims that he is in no credit with his tailor, whate'er his herald's coat may vouch, command the common respect of even the vulgar? No, for their cry is over,

“‘Be it better, or be it worse,
Please you the man that bears the purse.’”

“These are bold heresies,” said Walwyn, “and might cost thee a quarrel, promulgated on the other side of the Severn; but Master Owen is no knight-errant, to tilt with every man who disputes the derivation of birth to be in itself an infallible note of worthiness.”

“No, I thank Heaven,” replied Owen, “I am not contentious; mark you, but I have great pity for a gentleman who casts slights upon his ancestors; ’tis teaching a bad lesson to posterity, mark you.”

De Clare was satisfied. He perceived he had galled the Welchman, where he was most tender; for the tone and manner of Owen, were those of a man who had settled it with himself he would not be moved, but lacked the art to conceal he was.

It was now ten o’clock, and Clayton expressed his wonder that the rest were not come. While he was speaking, the door opened, and Nicholas Mortimer, and Wilfrid Overbury entered. Mortimer appeared as if he had just quitted his looking-glass; Overbury, as if he had never seen one in his life. The former smirked and ambled round the room, kissing his fingers to one, and smiling to another, while he twirled his crisp mustachios, or played with a love-lock, so as to show his seal ring to the best advantage. He was attired in a night-gown-cloak that trailed to his feet, and yet hardly covered his monstrous hose, which were stuffed out to the extreme amplitude of the fashion. His shoes, though within the statute, were of such a fantastical length, that their “beaks or pykes” menaced every man’s heels he approached.

Overbury spoke to no one, and was spoken to by none. They knew not him, nor he them; but he had come by public invitation, to take part in a business which was deemed to have some peril in it, and he looked upon whoever might be his companions, as he would have done upon his own crew of desperadoes. His appearance was hardly human. His features were almost wholly concealed by an enormous black, bushy beard, which spread over his cheeks nearly up to his eyes, and which seemed to lose itself in a shaggy head of hair of the same colour and texture, whose matted locks stood out like the bristles of a chafed boar. His mouth was hideously disfi-

gured by the loss of one-half of the upper lip, which had been slashed away in battle; his nose, also, had sustained much damage, for nothing was left of it but two flattened nostrils; and his forehead was seamed with ridgy scars, the evidence of many a fearful wound, which had healed without the surgeon's aid. He scowled round the room, as if to read, at a glance, the quality of his associates; while there was an expression of reckless ferocity in his eye, which bespoke a mind capable of cutting all their throats, if occasion required, and going to supper afterwards, with unwashed hands. He was of middle stature, with brawny limbs, square shoulders, and the resolute step of one who had been wont to tread amidst dangers, without picking his way too nicely. His air and manner, were as rugged and uncouth as his appearance.

The unwelcome presence of Overbury suspended, for a few moments, all conversation, every one seeming anxious to avoid any remark which might draw him into discourse. They would have been right glad to be rid of him altogether: but the peculiar circumstances under which he appeared among them, conferred upon him a sort of right to be there, which they could not well question. At length, Mortimer, to whom Peverell had shown the list of names, broke silence.

"I declare, by my faith and honour," said he, "here is my moon-calf friend, Walter Wilkins, venturing the little wits he has in this particular affair. Beshrew my tongue! I might have done him better justice, and called him golden-calf, as well as moon-calf; for it lies not within me to declare," he continued, turning round to Walwyn; who was at his elbow, "wherein he doth exceed—the fulness of his purse, or the emptiness of his head. Pardon me; I swear, by my manhood, I mean not to be critical or severe—for Walter is my particular friend; as you may conclude, when I tell you that I have been prevailed upon by him to accept his money, though I could never prevail upon him to accept usance or consideration, for the loan of it; and it is not every man whom I would so distinguish; no, by mine honour, it is not! But what shall he do here? He cannot bring his flatterers with him, and if he have not always good store of vailers—your ducking, cringing sycophants, who swarm round a rich fool, like flies round a honey-pot—he is naught; they are

his husbandmen who oil and water him, and his purse sweats for it. He loves to be commended, and I protest, by my veracity, he will go into the kitchen, but he will have it; for he had rather keep company with the dregs of men, than not be the best man of his company. But he is my friend, and I love him. You know him, De Clare?"

"Oh, yes," he replied, "and love him almost as well as thou dost, but not entirely; for *I* never saw the inside of his purse, as thou hast, and, therefore, stand not so near in my affection to him."

"Ha! ha! ha! thou wert always a good-humoured wag, by my valour," exclaimed Mortimer. "You say right pleasant things, and with such a frosty tongue, that thy matter and thy manner are like a wintry day in blithesome spring, or a merry jest in a church-yard: by mine honesty, it is so."

"Who speaks of church-yards, in a voice so jocund?" sighed forth Vehan, from his corner, where, till now, he had sat mute and motionless. "I court their pensive gloom," he continued, in accents dismally suited to his theme, "and stray among new-made graves to refresh my wearied spirits with melancholy, while I listen to the mandrake's groan."

"Ah! ha!" said Mortimer, briskly advancing towards Vehan; "art thou there, Monsieur Glow-worm, shining i' the dark like the good deeds of an humble Christian? I greet thee, with all my heart: for all my heart is thine, and, therefore, thy poor servant ever! The moon is in the heavens and looks pale, that her Endymion woos not her soft influence; her silver light is upon tree and fountain, and strays through the silent grove to seek thee. The hooting owl wings her heavy flight to find her lost companion, and Echo, the unseen nymph, dies for grief in her airy cell, because no sigh of thine hath made it vocal. For shame! hie thee to thy midnight haunts, or, by my gallantry, I'll play the moody lover myself, and steal away thy lady fair."

This gossamer raillery of Mortimer fell too lightly upon Vehan to make him feel it, but he was moved to a playful retort. "I fear thee not," said he, gently raising his eyes to Mortimer, "as a rival; for if the moon be indeed my mistress, she is too chaste for thee; and if the viewless

Echo answer to my plaint, her babbling tongue would but repeat thy shame as often as she heard *thy* voice." Then rising from his seat, and slowly advancing towards the rest, "Shall we go?" he added, addressing them.

"We wait the coming of some three or four, I believe," said Walwyn.

"Yes," replied Peverell, "there is mine host of *The Rose*, Master Benjamin Lacy, Mortimer's moon-calf, Walter Wilkins, and Hungerford Hoskyns, yet to arrive. I marvel they are so late, an' they mean to be men of their words."

"I would we were away," exclaimed Vehan, "if for no other reason than that so we might miss the presence of this Hungerford Hoskyns."

"You know them, then?" said De Clare.

"As the child knows physic," replied Vehan, "by its distasteful qualities."

"I think I have met him when in London," observed Walwyn, "at Effingham Howard's."

"Most likely," answered Vehan.

"He is the eldest son of his father," added Walwyn, "and speaks no language, as it were, but what smells of dogs and hawks, or is made up of grave saws, which seldom fit in the application."

"The same," said Vehan; "and he wears a sword to swear by, which he does as often as he hopes to escape, by that device, the necessity of drawing it."

"I have heard," said De Clare, "that he sends challenges by word of mouth, protesting, as a gentleman, he can neither read nor write; and his first prayer, in the morning, is, that he may forget whom he quarrelled with over night."

"He is an unbacked colt, a hot, mad-brained brawler," added Vehan, "whom my humour likes not."

"And he likes not thy humour, I conclude?" said Walwyn.

"He loves no humour but his own," replied Vehan, "which is to talk much, though the errand his tongue goes upon, it never compasseth."

"Yet he loves his friend so well," added De Clare, "that, when he gets into one, he uses him as the miser doth his doublet and hose—he wears him threadbare, ere he will forsake him."

"What means hath he?" inquired Walwyn.

"None that I know of," answered Vehan, "but the means of borrowing; and that he calls his estate at will, and the tenure by which he holds it. He cheats young gulls, fresh come to town, whom he styles stray waifs, which belong to him as lord of the manor of Knave's court."

Vehan had made a prodigious effort in bearing so large a share in this conversation. To have said as much in one speech, would have been beyond his power; it was only by the aid of short sentences, and intervals of rest, when others took up the discourse, that he was enabled to pour forth so many words. He seemed exhausted, however, and sank into his accustomed silence.

They were now joined by the remaining four, who arrived nearly together, for the hour was fast wearing towards the extreme point of delay. Mine host of *The Rose*, John Wintour, seemed surprised to find himself in such good company, and carried himself towards them as if they were his customers in the best room. The appearance of Lacy accorded well with his character, and former calling: a fine old soldier, with blood enough in his veins, yet, to make him the first in mounting a breach, or the last to retire from a mine to which the torch had been applied. Walter Wilkins, with his fair, round face, and flaxen beard, his pale blue, liquid eye, and half-closed mouth, looked like one who might easily be cozened, by a smooth phrase, out of his hundreds. He gazed round the room, not so much to note whom he saw, as to see by whom he was noted. Hungerford Hoskyns, as if he had overheard all the courteous things that had been said of him, and was for doffing aside the scandal of men's tongues by outfacing them, ran up to Vehan, shook him lustily by the hand, nodded familiarly to De Clare, and, with a hearty thwack on the shoulders of Walwyn, exclaimed, "Here I am as true as steel; Brag, you know, was a good dog, but Holdfast was a better!" Then, humming the words of an old ballad,

"Let the welkin roar,
We'll ne'er give o'er,"

he inquired of the mayor, at what hour old Flibbertigibbet received company at the Abbey?

"There are enough of us to keep each other's courage warm," observed Wilkins, "whatever may chance."

Enough!" exclaimed Hungerford Hoskyns; "yes, I warrant ye: for my own part, I boast not—my tongue never goes before my deeds; but this I say, though I rejoice to see you all, yet, if I had come here singly, as, by heavens, I knew not but I might—singly would I have gone to this same Abbey, and put Signior Beelzebub to flight. He should have found me no—what is the name of that patch, who left his handful of wits behind him last night?"

"You mean Kit Barnes," replied Peverell. "He is well remembered—who has heard of him, since the evening?"

"That have I," quoth the mayor. "I despatched my man, Crab, not an hour ago, to bring me tidings. There has been no change; he lies like one of whom you can only say he lives because he breathes. It is passing strange!"

"Bah!" ejaculated Hoskyns, "what is there to be amazed at? He was but a fool, and scared by his own imagination first, he scared others afterwards by the effect it had upon himself. I dare be sworn we shall all live to tell the wonderful nothings that will happen. I am eager for the sport, and long to unkennel this mystery."

"It is time," said Peverell, gravely, addressing himself to the whole company, "that we departed. The chimes have gone the three quarters, and it were well, I think, that we should be at the Abbey gates before the eleventh hour strikes."

Every one stood prepared to move, when the mayor, placing the keys of the Abbey in Peverell's hand, observed, that "he had done his best to provide for their convenience and comfort. He had ordered—but found some difficulty, he acknowledged, in having his orders executed—that lights should be placed in the Abbey; nor had he forgotten, what some, if not all, might be pleased to find, wherewith to cheer their bodies; for good wine," he observed, "gave a needful fillip, now and then, to the stoutest heart."

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY left the mayor's house, and proceeded to the Abbey. As, on the preceding night, there were many assembled. It was not generally known who were to go, except Peverell and Clayton; but it was vaguely surmised there would be others, and curiosity was on tiptoe, independently of any other excitement, to know how the proclamation in the market-place had fared. A profound silence prevailed, interrupted only by a buzz of astonishment, when they saw the number. One among the crowd counted them by fours, as they came forth, "Four—four—four—and Peverell is the last." He started: the words of Kit Barnes, and the mysterious voice, that had breathed into his own ears the night before, flashed across his mind. A taper, which Crab held tremblingly in his hand, fell upon the countenance of the individual;—it was a man, meanly attired, whom Peverell knew not;—he passed on, and dismissed from his mind the thoughts that were crowding there.

They reached the Abbey just as the bell tolled eleven.

"You have the keys," said Walwyn, addressing Peverell.

"Yes—but;—" he paused, and looked anxiously around him.

"Unlock the doors, and let us enter," added Lacy.

Peverell fumbled with the keys, as if trying to open the massy portals.

"Can you not see?" observed De Clare, "the moon shines brightly enough."

"It does," answered Peverell, "but—"

"But what?" exclaimed Wilfrid Overbury, in a voice like thunder. "If thou art afraid, give them to me—a legion of devils should not drive me back."

"I and fear," replied Peverell, calmly, "are as little acquainted as thou and—" He checked himself: it was no time for a war of words. "I—expect—another," he added slowly, "one who should be here on a business like this."

"Whom?" interrogated Lacy.

"I know not—but it was a compact between us; I have fulfilled my part, and—he comes!"

At this moment the clattering of horses' feet was heard. The next, Fitz-Maurice, followed by his page, was seen galloping towards the Abbey. The earth rung beneath the tread of their coursers. The figure of Fitz-Maurice, beheld through the misty atmosphere, faintly illumined by the moon's rays, was magnified beyond its natural dimensions; his cloak floated on the wind; his sable ostrich plume, seemed to wave in mid air; and as he drew nearer, the breath which exhaled from the nostrils of his charger, curled round his wildly flowing mane, like wreaths of fiery smoke. At one bound, he appeared to clear a space of many yards, and halting in the midst of them, he sprang from his saddle, before the dwarf was at hand to take the bridle. Overbury offered to hold the noble animal, but he plunged and reared, as if disdainful of constraint, when the page came up, and led him, prancing, from the place.

"I have ridden some threescore miles, since the sun went down, to accomplish this," said Fitz-Maurice, taking Peverell by the hand; "but my word was plighted to you, as thine to me, and time and distance were as naught."

"I had no misgivings," replied Peverell. Then, turning round to those who were about him, lost in amazement at what they had seen, "You shall know more hereafter," he added: "suffice it, for the present, you have my assurance that this gentle stranger is worthy to take part in what we are about."

Fitz-Maurice bowed gracefully to them;—and his salutation was courteously returned.

Peverell now threw open the Abbey-doors; and for a moment there was an amusing display of mutual respect. An invincible feeling of politeness seemed to keep every one from taking precedency; but, at last, old Benjamin Lacy marched in, as if he were about to advance up to an enemy's battery, at the head of his regiment. The rest followed; and now the direct contrary feeling appeared to animate them, for, instead of standing upon the ceremony of precedency, the only anxiety seemed to be to get in, as if each man were unwilling to be the last.

Fitz-Maurice stood aside to let them all pass; he then

entered himself, and was followed by Peverell, who locked the doors, and deposited the keys in a corner near them.

At the farther extremity of the north aisle, a table was spread, upon which were burning six large waxen tapers. The light they gave, dimly illuminated only that portion of the interior, leaving, in gloomy shadows, all the rest. Slowly and silently passing along the cold stone floor, they traversed the body of the Abbey, its lofty vaulted roof, and massive walls, giving back their steps in faint but solemn echoes. Under any circumstances, such a place, and such an hour, must have inspired sentiments of holy awe; but expecting, as they did, to witness, they knew not at what moment some fearful vision—some horrible visitation from the world of shadows—those sentiments were raised to an intense and almost overpowering character.

By degrees, however, they rallied from this oppressive feeling; and a slight incident called forth demonstrations of mirth even. As yet, not a word had been spoken, when Overbury, who was striding along by the side of Clayton, suddenly sneezed. Any where, the explosion would have startled a by-stander; but within the sounding walls of the Abbey, it was little less than the report of a pistol. "Christ protect me!" cried Clayton, starting back, "what is that?" Mortimer was close behind him, the beak of whose extravagantly fashionable shoe striking against Clayton's heel, he caught hold of De Clare, and exclaimed, "Did you feel that?"

"What?" said De Clare.

"I crave your pardon!" interrupted Mortimer, apologizing to Clayton for what he considered his own untowardness.

"Oh!" replied Clayton, forcing a bewildering smile, "was it you?"

A hearty laugh followed, at poor Clayton's expense, and especially at the circumstance of his fancying, for the moment, that De Clare could feel the kick he had received himself.

"This is a merry beginning," quoth mine host.

"May we have as merry an ending!" ejaculated Walter Wilkins.

"Mirth beseems not with this place," said Vehan, "neither with the hour, nor the business we are upon."

"What should we do but be merry," exclaimed Hoskyns, "seeing his worship hath so bountifully provided us with the provocatives thereto? What have we here?" he continued, taking up a bottle, and filling a cup with its contents. "I drink to you all, in a potation of choice Canary. Excellent, i' faith!" quaffing it off, and smacking his lips—"and here is the neat wine of Orleance—herè amber-coloured Candy—divine ipocras-charneco," looking at one bottle after the other. "Marry, some beloved brown bastard too, with divers other quick-spirited liquors; and for thee, mine host," he added, "a flagon of good double beer, such as thine own tapster never drew, old red lattice. And here be meats, too, for strong appetites; comfits for dainty palates; marchpane, rare anchovies, a dish of carraways, pears, biscuits, and hard cheese. Pray God my girdle break not, an' I regale me here to the extent of my temptation."

This skimble-skamble soliloquy of Hungerford Hoskyns, had the effect of diffusing a certain degree of gaiety among the majority. Peverell, indeed, was grave, for manifold reasons; Vehan for one, his humour; Clayton for fears which he could not subdue; and De Clare, from an atrabilious temperament. But the rest, saving Fitz-Maurice, who noted all with a cold and strange aspect, as if he were there to observe how events shaped themselves, rather than to be a partaker of them, evinced no equivocal disposition to convert the occasion into a merry meeting.

"Here I ensconce myself," exclaimed Hoskyns gaily, taking his seat at the head of the table, "and am ready to receive the foul fiend, whenever he chooses to make his entrance." The others followed his example, and took their places. Fitz-Maurice seated himself opposite Hoskyns.

"I am the lord, though not the founder, of the feast," said Hoskyns. "Whew! but it is cold! I wish his worship had bethought him of our outsides, as well as our insides, and given us a seacoal fire, and strewed the floor with fresh sedges and rushes. Come! a cup round: let each man fill of the liquor he likes best, and pledge me. And now, to while away the time, who has a quaint story, or laughter moving jest, to impart? Walter Wilkins, methinks thou hast a facetious look about thee."

Walter stroked his beard, and glanced at Hoskyns, as

if he would say, "thou hast a shrewd wit to find out men's parts in their visage."

"I am but indifferent well, at these things," quoth he; "however, 'tis the willing mind we love—so I'll e'en to it, and ye shall ha'e my best. Hem!

"A certain covetous man, in Bononia, lost his purse with twenty-one ducats in it, which, when he could not recover with diligent search, he raved like a madman, and in the end, was ready to have hanged himself for sorrow. Another honest man having found such a purse, moved with compassion, came and delivered the same to this covetous person, who, never thanking the bringer, fell forthwith to telling of the money, and finding but twenty ducats therein, with great greediness he exacted the odd ducat; which, because the finder denied, he is brought before the magistrate, a man of very great wealth, but of very little wit;—but such magistrates are many times elected, where the matter lieth in the mouths of the multitude. The one party sweareth there were twenty-one ducats in the purse which he lost; the other party swear-eth that there were but twenty ducats in the purse which he found. The magistrate, though a fool, giveth no foolish sentence; for he pronounced, that the purse which was found, was not that purse which was lost, and, therefore, condemned the covetous person to restore the twenty ducats to the other party."

"A most worthy magistrate," said De Clare, when the other had finished; "and yet he had very great wealth, but very little wit, do you mark?" he continued, addressing himself to Mortimer. "There be more men of that quality, to your thinking, or I mistake!" significantly alluding to the character which Mortimer had given of his friend Wilkins, when he called him "a golden-calf," as well as a "moon-calf."

Mortimer did not relish the jest, and, wishing to escape from the gibling malice of De Clare, he exclaimed, "An excellent tale! by my faith: it reminds me of one which did happen while I was upon my travels in France, and which, with the good leave of those present, I will relate."

"At Paris, one morning, a hungry, poor man, begging his alms from door to door, did at the last espy very good cheer at a cook's house; whereat, by and by, his teeth be-

gan to water, and the spur of his empty and eager stomach pricking him forwards, he made as much haste towards the place as his feeble feet would give him leave; where he was no sooner come, but the pleasant smell, partly of the meat, partly of the sauce, did catch sure hold of the poor man's nose, that, as if he had been fast holden by a pair of pincers, he had no power to pass from thence, until he had, to stay the fury of his raging appetite, eaten a piece of bread which he had of charity gotten in another place, in the eating whereof, his sense was so delighted with the fresh smell of the cook's cates, that albeit, he did not lay his lips to any morsel thereof, yet, in the end, his stomach was so well satisfied with the smell only thereof, that he plainly acknowledged himself thereby to have gotten as good a breakfast, as if he had indeed there eaten his bellyfull of the best cheer; which, when the cook had heard, being an egregious wrangler, and an impudent companion, what doth he, but all hastily steps forth to the poor fellow, lays fast hand upon him, and in a hot, cholerick mood, bids him pay for his breakfast. The honest, poor man, half-amazed at this strange demand, wist not well what to say; but the cook was so much the more fierce and earnest, by how much he perceived the good man to be abashed at his boldness; and did so cunningly cloak the matter, that in the end, the poor man was content to refer the deciding of the controversy to whatsoever person should next pass by that way, and without any more ado, to abide his judgment; which thing was no sooner concluded, but by and by, cometh unto the place a very natural fool, and such a notorious idiot as in all Paris his like was not to be found. All the better for me, thought the cook, for more he doubted the sentence of a wise man than of a fool. Well, sirs, to this foresaid judge they rehearsed the whole fact: the cook cruelly complaining, and the other patiently confessing, as before. A great multitude of people were gathered about them, no less desirous to know what would follow, than wondering at that which had gone before. To conclude, this natural, perceiving what money the cook exacted, caused the poor man to put so much money betwixt two basins, and to shake it up and down in the cook's hearing, which done, he did arbitrate and award, that as the poor man was satisfied with only the smell of the cook's meat, so the cook should be re-

compensated with only the noise of the poor man's money. Which judgment was so commended, that whoso heard the same, thought, if Cato or Solomon had been there to decide the controversy, they could not have given a more indifferent or just sentence."

"Oh, rare fool!" exclaimed De Clare: "it is thus Heaven rebukes man's pride, and schools his presumption! The wisdom of a Solomon in the crazed pate of a natural! Give me a very idiot for a judge, where I am the sufferer of wrong, but ever a judge who is an idiot, where I am myself the wrong doer. Thus shall even Justice do me right, in the injuries of other, and her crooked sister spare me in mine own."

"You pray like the mariner," said Walwyn, "that the wind may always blow in the direction of the course he would steer."

"I pray as all men do in their hearts," replied De Clare, "whatever their tongues speak to the contrary—and that is, that they may be neither sunk in quicksands, nor overtaken by tempests; or, to renounce parables, that they may escape knaves, and the punishment of knavery."

"A truce to this sharp contention of thy wit," said Hoskyns, "and let us not be prodigal of the time that is ours. At twelve, we may look for visiters, who will hold us quite in another manner of parley, or truth is a fable. How say you?—shall we carouse, or sit, till then, like expectant sacrifices to the grim powers of darkness?"

"A booze—a booze!" growled forth Wilfrid Overbury, whose liberal potations had oiled his several parts of speech, and overflowed the barriers which had hitherto divided him from the rest. "Your plentiful drink is that which fills the heart with the flood-tide of courage: a man's valour doth ever ebb and flow with his stoup of liquor."

"Thou sayest well, friend," quoth mine host, "there is much virtue in good liquor; ergo—he who selleth it, is, in some sort, a public benefactor. It is a breed-bate, indeed, on occasions, and provoketh to quarrel; but then, if it getteth a man into a brawl, it getteth him out again. For example:—I broke Tib, the carrier's, head on Monday last; he comes to me, on Tuesday, with a napkin round it, 'and,' quoth he, 'John Wintour, you were

drunk last night.' 'I know it,' quoth I. 'You broke my head,' quoth he. 'I did,' quoth I. 'I am going to the justice,' quoth he. 'Look here,' quoth I, 'thou art three and four pence on the score for single beer, besides eight pence for small ale.' 'I am,' quoth he. 'This is Tuesday,' quoth I, 'and thou shalt have a free score till Saturday, added to it, an' that will heal thy cracked crown?' 'Content,' quoth he; 'and thou shalt break my head again, come next Monday, so you provide me with the same week's plaister for my green wound.'"

"A valiant drunkard is but a counterfeit man, mark you," said Owen Rees, addressing Overbury; "a mad-man, in his lunes, mind you."

"Brimstone and Lucifer!" exclaimed Overbury, "call you me lunatic and counterfeit? Do you suspect my courage?"

"Brimstone and Lucifer!" repeated Owen, his face reddening; "you do ill to bring your friends, unbidden, into this good company; it is not mannerly, I must be bold to tell you."

"Do you gleek at me, mountain goat?" bellowed Overbury.

A dire strife had here ensued, (for the Welchman had started from his seat, and Overbury sprung up, thrusting his hand beneath his cloak, as if to grasp some weapon,) but Peverell interposed himself between them.

"Is this a time for idle feuds?" said he; "your places! and if a hasty word have fired your bloods, let a cup of wine, filled out in fellowship, drown the memory of it. Come,—I'll pledge you in this brisk charneco."

The appeal was well timed. Overbury and Rees filled their cups, and peace was restored.

The conduct and appearance of Fitz-Maurice were now beginning to excite attention. Save the few words he addressed to Peverell at his first coming, his lips had not once unclosed, nor had his countenance betokened that he participated in any thing which had occurred. There was nothing austere or gloomy in his manner, which indicated only profound abstraction. Except that his eyes occasionally wandered round the table, he seemed unconscious that he was not alone. The ludicrous fright of Clayton, the boisterous jollity of Hoskyns, the tales of Wilkins and Mortimer, the biting sarcasms of De Clare,

the tapster humour of mine host, and the sudden quarrel between Overbury and Rees, had all passed like shadows, making no visible present impression, nor leaving any apparent trace behind. He had tasted of nothing that was spread before him; and Hoskyns, noting this, thought it a fair occasion for making him cast away his silence.

"Sir stranger," said he, "you partake not of our cheer."

Fitz-Maurice bowed courteously, in recognition, as it were, of the kindness pressed upon him; but signifying, at the same time, his desire to decline it.

"Will it please you to receive my challenge?" continued Hoskyns, pouring out some wine.

Fitz-Maurice, with the same air of grace and gentleness, expressed his silent refusal.

All eyes were turned upon him during this brief address from Hoskyns. The gaze of Peverell was keen and searching. His look had a meaning which only Fitz-Maurice could penetrate, and which he would have penetrated, but that he relapsed forthwith into his moody contemplation. It was no longer, however, the same unperturbed solitude of the mind. The passions were at work within, and their movements were charactered upon his face. The emotions of an anxious spirit overspread his features, and more than once his hand was pressed upon that part of his brow where Peverell knew (though his clustering hair concealed it from the general view) the "crimson trophy of his victory" was stamped, which "sometimes burned inwards to his brain." His manner became restless and agitated; and straining his eyes, as if to pierce the gloomy obscure which enveloped the whole extent of the Abbey, beyond the immediate spot where the tapers burned, he seemed like one who watched the approach of some dreadful object.

In a moment, all discourse and revelry ceased. Every eye took its direction from Fitz-Maurice's, and every head was turned.

"What is it?" whispered Hoskyns.

"Do you see aught?" exclaimed Lacy.

"How goes the hour?" said Clayton.

"Is it twelve, yet?" inquired Wilkins.

"Hark!" interrupted Mortimer, "what noise was that?"

While they were thus gazing on vacancy, and every bosom (ay, even Peverell's, Overbury's, Lacy's, and they who had no touch of unseemly fear in their composition) beat high with mysterious apprehension, a blush of light, rather than light itself, was gradually diffused over the whole interior of the Abbey. It resembled that delicate vermilion tinge, which, in the height of summer, announces the glorious coming of the sun, before the eastern hills blaze in the splendour of his ascent over their proud tops. It appeared as if the place were filled with a fine, transparent atmosphere, steeped in the richest hues of pale red roses. Through this thin veil of charmed air, every part of the Abbey was dimly visible; and it sent forth a delicious perfume, more grateful to the senses than all the odoriferous drugs and spices of Arabia, which seemed to dissolve them in the languor of luxurious repose.

This scene of wonder was contemplated in silent astonishment. Not a whisper was heard. Gradually it melted away, grew fainter and fainter, and at last wholly disappeared.

But it was followed by wonders of another and more appalling kind. For now, a dark blue mist or vapour was seen creeping along the ground, rolling surge on surge, like the tide of the ocean, and ascending higher and higher every moment. It curled up the walls, wreathed itself into shapes of life, or formed objects of nameless horror, striking so cold upon the limbs, and so chilling to the blood, that their knees smote each other, and their teeth chattered.

At this moment the Abbey bell tolled the first hour of twelve. It sounded like the clangour of a hundred enormous bells, each striking at the same instant.

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed Peverell; "behold!"

Close by the door stood Kit Barnes, and by the side, the old man—the goblin with the iron hand, who with an exulting look pointed towards those at the other end. The appearance of Kit was no longer that of one who belonged to this earth. The phantom figure, grisly and cadaverous, seemed a hideous incorporation of the blue mist itself, rather than a form enveloped in it; for, as the vapour thickened, his spectral shape darkened into obscurity, and at length faded from the sight.

Mean while, the exhalation grew more and more dense,

almost imperceptibly changing its colour from a grayish blue to a deep black, and, in its undulations, presenting the image of a huge pall, flapping to and fro, while its motion seemed to generate a current of freezing air, which benumbed the faculties. The tapers, though not extinguished, shed no light; for the flame of each was congealed, and looked like small stars glimmering through a tempestuous cloud. All power of speech was suspended, and almost of action, from the rigidity of the muscles, produced by the intense coldness of the vapour. The eyes and the ears alone, of all the corporeal agents, retained their functions; and it seemed as if this exception had been made, only that they might become instruments of torture to the mind.

The bell had ceased tolling, but its deafening alarm still echoed through the Abbey, in crashing peals, whose mingling tones, at times, resembled the howling, screaming, and yelling of every savage animal that ranges the forest or the desert. At others, low, mournful, melancholy sounds were heard; soft lamentations, gentle wailings, and stifled groans, as if all the miserable varieties of human suffering were there gathered together. Then voices struck upon the ear—some blaspheming—some uttering exclamations of despair—some praying—some beseeching—some, in anguish, crying aloud, *pardon! pardon!* With these were blended, ever and anon, shouts of laughter, which seemed to burst, in horrid volleys, from infernal throats. One of these shouts—a loud and lengthened one—was heard to follow a dismal shriek, as from a living creature in more than mortal agony: and then, for a moment, all was hushed, and still as death.

They were in utter darkness—darkness so profound, that, though each one touched the other, to have distinguished form or feature, were as impossible as though divided by the space of a thousand miles. But dreadful were the visions that thronged about them. Above, below, around, the world of shadows presented itself. On the sable pall of gelid air that encompassed them, what hideous phantoms grew, as it were, and straight vanished, to make room for others still more hideous! Hovering over them, grim DEATH appeared, clutching in his bony hand the fatal arrow, that never flies but once to its mark; —'tis held in threatening poise,—while the fell monarch

seems to glare from his eyeless sockets, with conscious triumph at his prey!

DEATH's terrific revels burst on the sight in every shape—from new-born infancy, that dies in the very portals of life, to calm expiring age. There writhes the murdered traveller,—his crammed bags rifled of their tempting store!—There gapes the gory throat of the butchered father, whose caitiff son, impatient to be rich, had held the knife!—There hangs the felon, strangled by the award of justice: his straining eyes bursting from their spheres, and his livid features swollen with overcharged blood.—There the incest-engendered babe, whose guilty dam, frantic with shame at her unnatural lust, had smothered it in the dark, not daring to look upon her foul burden; and there the violated virgin; the imprecations upon her ravisher still warm upon her lips, as they were arrested there by the stroke that pierced her heart!

These vanish, and legions of grisly phantoms take their place; things without form or name, but horrible—most horrible to the eye! Floating on the murky vapour, they pass and repass, till overwrought terror rises to agony. Sometimes they almost seem to fan you with their enormous wings—at others, to shed blistering venom down:—and then—cataracts of fire, as it were, spout from hissing serpents, which twine and coil around them! Reptiles of all loathsome kinds—the adder, and the blind worm—the speckled toad, and the huge bloated spider—the fierce scorpion, and the gilded snake, whirl and eddy about, and so close, withal, that the flesh on their bones shrinks from the dreaded contact!

In the midst of these appalling shadows, reappeared one of frightful aspect. Suddenly—the spectral form of Kit Barnes became visible,—seated at the table,—and clothed in the garb of the grave. His shrouded arm was wound round the body of Walter Wilkins, which seemed gradually to wither away, till at length there sat his ghastly companion alone, in his seat! He looked sorrowfully upon the rest, and pointed to his left arm, on which was visibly imprinted the mark of a hand—the iron hand of the goblin. Then addressing himself, as it were, to speak, the phantom slowly melted into air!

And now the wizard scene began to change.—The hurly-burly ceased; the abhorred and venomous reptiles

disappeared—the unhallowed visions of murder, in its most dire and bloody forms, vanished, and pallid DEATH himself, no longer startled the aching sight. The loud din of the roaring bell was silenced; the sharp and freezing mist, like frosty winter melting in the lap of spring, kindled into genial warmth; while its murky colour, and almost palpable obscurity, softened into a gray filmy vapour, as it now curled downwards from the roof, and rolled itself again in surging waves along the floor; the tapers once more gave forth their faint and unsteady light; and the balmy, roseate atmosphere, which, at the first, had bathed the senses in delicious languor with its perfumed breath, again diffused its vermilion canopy, till it gradually faded from the sight with a fainter and fainter glow, like the farewell rays of the setting sun, lingering on the bosom of the western sky.



CHAPTER IX.

“It is past!” exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, in a tone of exhausted agony.

“By the immortal heavens!” ejaculated Vehan, “I do not believe the eye of man hath ever before seen the like.”

“The like!” said Walwyn—“no, nor its most remote similitude: the earth hath no twin wonders of this quality.”

“It is most marvellous, I am free to confess,” observed De Clare; “and but that our senses testify the truth, our tongues would shame to avouch that which we have beheld.”

“What may it all mean?” said Peverell. “We are not here as children, to be scared with sights which baffled reason cannot cope with. How are we to construe these portents?”

“How?” interrupted Overbury; “by an easy enough rule. Hell has played one of its pranks before us; and that’s the end of it.”

The rest were silent. Although disenthralled from the spell that had bound them, and their suspended powers of speech and motion restored, they merely looked on each other with dumb amazement. Even old Benjamin Lacy, whose cheek had never blenched in the hottest dangers of the field, wore a countenance that would not have disparaged a woman's spirit; and, as to Clayton, the echo of his own voice, at that moment, would have been a sufficient counter-sign for his passport to the other world. Mine host, too, showed manifest symptoms of having been employed much less to his satisfaction, than in breaking Tib the carrier's head, at the expense even of a week's free score for single beer and small ale.

"What's here?" said Peverell, looking on the ground.

"By my faith!" exclaimed Mortimer, "my excellent friend, Walter Wilkins, frightened out of himself, and into a fit;—and no great wonder, either."

They lifted him up. He was lifeless!

At first, it was thought he had only swooned, from the excess of his fears; and the more likely so, as he was not accounted a man endued with much vigour of mind. But every effort to rouse him, either by violent shaking, or by forcing small quantities of wine into his mouth, proved unavailing.

"He has swallowed his last draught in this world," said Overbury, laying down the cup, and placing the head of the dead man against the back of the chair in which he had been supporting him. "I have never seen a corpse, an' he be not one."

• They all gathered mournfully round the body.

"It would seem," said Lacy, "as if some violent convulsion had seized him, from the livid colour of the face, and this appearance of strangulated blood in the throat."

The features were slightly distorted, apparently with overpowering terror; and round the throat there was a black mark, such as Lacy had described.

"Poor fool!" exclaimed De Clare, "thou shouldst have died in thy bed; but the ambition to be what thou art not, pricked thee on to find an untimely grave here. A church-yard sprite, formed, ere the cock crew, by the deceitful beams of the moon, would have done as much for thee, but thou always hadst wit enough to keep the high way."

"He was ever a timorous creature," observed Mortimer.

"Ay, sir," replied De Clare, "and fear ever builds her throne of shadows in such natures."

"It will be a heavy hour for his now childless mother, when she hears of it!" responded Mortimer.

"But a merry one for some, I ween," said De Clare, with a stinging emphasis; "for bondless debtors, who enrolled themselves his friends, and made themselves—the minions of his purse."

"You have the advantage of me," replied Mortimer, with an air of easy indifference; "I protest, by my character, your speech ranges farther than I can discern."

"Like enough—like enough," answered De Clare. "It were a foolish speech for a quiet man to make, which should be so gross in its application, that he must fall to loggerheads afterwards to maintain it."

Mortimer bit his nether lip; for he was really galled more than he cared to manifest, by the bitter taunts of De Clare, who felt a supreme contempt for him, and took no pains to conceal it.

"When a cur snarles," said Mortimer, affecting much cool scorn, "I always the rather take it as a warning to avoid, than as a provocation to beat him;" and he turned his back. De Clare smiled, as he would have done at a froward baby which had hurt itself in falling, and forthwith began to chide the stone that bruised it.

This sharp dialogue had passed almost unnoticed by those who were standing round the lifeless body of Wilkins, so deeply were their several thoughts engrossed by that afflicting sight. It was strange, but no one adverted to a circumstance which all had seen, and which Peverell alone recalled with a foreboding spirit—the vision of Kit Barnes, seated by the side of him who now lay dead before them—as his form, then, seemed to fade away, in the withering embrace of the spectre. A prophetic conviction dwelt upon Peverell's mind, that Kit himself had ceased to be numbered among the inhabitants of this earth; but he awaited the fact in silence.

"I have witnessed, ere now, a fatal scene like this," said Fitz-Maurice.

They drew back at the sound of his voice, as issuing from one whom they heard for the first time. Fitz-Maurice perceived the effect of his words, and thus addressed them:

"You have been perplexed by my manner this night, I have sat with you, an *invited* guest, as this good gentleman can aver," pointing to Peverell; "but I have not eaten, nor drunk, at your board; neither have I held discourse with any among you. You shall learn the reason thereof. It were tedious, however, to repeat all that matter, pertaining to myself, which I this morning disclosed here," again pointing to Peverell; "he, at his leisure and discretion, can impart what may satisfy your curiosity; but this receive from me, and it is all, the knowledge whereof the occasion demands.

"In my youth I knew a famous exorcist; one, who, by his powerful art, could subdue the fiends of the lower world, when they infected this. I had his love, as he had the young affections of my heart; for he was gentle and kind, withal; though a lone, self-banished man, that lived remote from the haunts of cities. In the deep silence of the midnight hour, when we have sat beside some quiet stream, the passage of whose smooth course could be noted only by the idle weed or crisp leaf that floated on its current; or, looking from the dizzy height of some jutting rock, have worshipped the living fires of the wide-spread firmament above us, he would oft unfold to me the mysteries of enchanted lore. I listened, with mute wonder and admiring awe, to the thrilling secrets of nature, and of occult science which he disclosed. The subtle charms he wrought—but ever for benign purposes—by the knowledge he had obtained of the coy properties of each mineral, flower, herb, root, blood of the untamed libbard—dew brushed from reeking graves in the dim twilight, and countless other elements of cunning power,—were made familiar to me; and, but that he was mortal, and so, subject to that death we all owe, I had been instructed in his art far, far beyond my present having.

"But I lost him not before I had drunk deep of mysteries beyond my then imagination to conceive; in even its wildest dreams. He taught me the rare lesson I have this night practised; the faculty, by sure and certain preparation, of seeing, WITH THE MIND, what to our grosser visual organs, is invisible. I was wrapt, when you thought me silent only. One word, one act of earthly quality, as to eat, or drink, or walk, had plunged me from the mystic world into which I had passed, and whence I saw the BEGINNING and the END!

"Now mark me," he continued, with increased solemnity of manner. "By what YE have witnessed, I call upon you to go on; by what I have seen, and which to tell, were perdition, till the hour of fulfilment comes, I bid you be of good cheer. Seek not to know the meaning of my words beyond this: that ye are not the puppets of chance,—that each and every of ye, have moved in this business by no free will of your own, howe'er it may seem to yourselves;—and that what is TO BE,—is to be done.

"For this unhappy gentleman, whose grievous state we all lament, let him remain here till morning, when it will be meet he be removed. I must away to-night: my steed waits: and necessity urges."

"What should we do to-morrow?" said Peverell, addressing Fitz-Maurice.

"Be silent, and watch the signs that shall show themselves. Speak not of what ye know; neither among yourselves, nor to others; but let each man, with his finger on his lips, follow the business that calls him. I tell you enigmas; wait, and they shall be unriddled."

"Do you return to us?" inquired Walwyn.

"Ere the sun goes down to-morrow," replied Fitz-Maurice, "thy question shall be resolved."

"Why not now?" exclaimed Overbury.

The countenance of Fitz-Maurice kindled into gloomy wrath, as he cast a fierce glance at Overbury.

"Why not now?" said Peverell, repeating the question emphatically. "*Let no man trust to-morrow—it is the cheat of life—the future that never comes—the grave of many a buried enterprise of noble birth—Then, why not now?*"

Fitz-Maurice smiled. These were his own words—his own earnest persuasions to Peverell, in the morning, when urging him not to delay the purpose he had that night accomplished. He felt the force of the appeal so adroitly made.

"My friend," said Fitz-Maurice, laying his hand familiarly on Peverell's shoulder, "I read you as you would have me; and hadst thou possessed as good reasons wherewith to put me off, when I so addressed you this morning, as I have, now, to say thee nay, then hadst thou not, in this place, and at this moment, thus skilfully have pointed

mine own weapons against myself. But be *thou* satisfied, at least: *thou*, who hast had such cause to know what confidence I am worthy of; and let thy example be an argument with those who have not the same authority to vouch for me."

"I accept the conditions," replied Peverell; "as these gentlemen will, I doubt not, my assurance, for thy honourable bearing towards them."

Fitz-Maurice was now moving towards the doors of the Abbey, when a loud knocking was heard without, and the noise of voices in contention with some one who demanded entrance.

"What more?" said Fitz-Maurice.

The knocking continued, as did the clamour of tongues.

"It is likely, some of the town's-people," observed Peverell, "impatient to learn what hath happened since we were here."

He took up the keys from the corner where he had deposited them, and opened the door.

It was Madge who would enter, and whom some twenty or more, men and women, were striving to remove.

"You are well to do," she exclaimed, seeing Peverell, "to keep him here and mock me thus!"

"Whom seek you, woman?" said De Clare.

"God help me!" she replied, "I do fear I am crazed. But he is dead!"

"Who is dead?" inquired Fitz-Maurice.

"I told you how it would be," continued Madge, still addressing herself to Peverell—"did I not? ay,—Madge was right; and when I said, the day that saw Marian in her grave, would see him ready for his, the truth was in me—as surely as the rest will follow, *and I for mine!* These were my very words—and Heaven has heard my prayer—for my heart is breaking, hour by hour."

"Do you know this cot-quean, this callet?" said Overbury to Peverell.

"Revile her not," replied Peverell; "she is distraught with sore affliction, and it is her grief, not her reason, that speaks. You heard the lamentable end of the poor idiot girl, but two days since," he continued, addressing the rest; "she was her mother, and you see what it has done for her. Him she talks of, who is dead, was Kit Barnes,

who last night came hither alone, and whom this now bewildered creature tended on his death-bed."

"Will you hear the manner of it?" suddenly interrupted Madge, her attention roused by the name of Kit Barnes, and the mention of his death-bed. "It has been a fearful hour, and something more, I have had with him. The day passed as the night had done, and the evening as the day: and my sweet Marian lies not more calmly, than did this huge rough man of mighty limbs, save ever and anon that the tolling of the bell now above me, shook him with fierce convulsion. But then approached the horrible eleventh hour, and oh! what rending pangs began to seize him. How he tossed to and fro, and rolled in agony! His eyes opened, his lips unclosed,—but his look was frenzy—his voice, the howl of the wild dog. 'Show me visions!' he exclaimed. 'False fiend! I am thine only yet another night, and thou beliest the troth-plight that made me thine.'—Then would he strive to pray; but holy words were strangled in his throat. And now the hour of eleven went. He shrieked dismally—'Tramp! tramp! tramp!' quoth he, 'See how they gallop! Four!—and four and four!—See how they enter! Oh, brave fiend! brave fiend! I worship thee! They smile too! Deck shrouds with roses, and let the woodbine flaunt o'er graves, an' they can smile! Hark! the merry jest, and mirth-moving tale! This is thy triumph, subtle fiend—this thy master mock—to make men laugh beside their coffins, or ere the death-worm breeds in their flesh!' Thus did he rave, while I stood by him, and with my napkin soaked up the big round drops of sweat that bathed his brow; and I spoke to him words of such comfort as my poor wit could frame; but, alack! 'twas past with him to hear a mortal voice. Oh, sirs! mine was a sad office. All had left me to come hither—and there I was, alone, with this dying man, while all my thoughts were with my own dead child. What could I do? E'en what I did: pray by him, though he heard me not; and minister to his wants, though he knew it not. At the last came the worst, for now 'twas midnight nearly, and sharp were the pangs he suffered. He had lain still and silent, it may be, scant half an hour, when he heard the chimes of the three quarters. He sprang from his bed, on to the floor, and alas! the while, how he looked! The remembrance of it, even

now, scares me from myself. He talked, too, as it were, to one by his side, though only I stood there, weeping and praying. He yelled, he stamped, he writhed; and, grasping his left arm, 'I feel you,' he said: 'thy touch is death;' and then he shivered, as though each joint were shaken by ague, while blood, for sweat, burst forth on his face and hands. Thus he stood, till the twelfth hour struck, and then exclaiming, 'I come! I come! oh, fiend, to do thy appointed work this night!'—he fell,—nor ever moved again. He was a corpse—e'en as I left him, to come hither and tell thee of it."

There was a simple yet terrible pathos, a wild energy of manner, and an unpremeditated eloquence, infused into her recital, by Madge, which awakened deep sympathy, not to say emotions of a stronger character, in those whom she addressed. Peverell, especially, who had witnessed the progress of Kit's strange affection, and who now recalled to mind the illusion, if indeed it were such, of the night before, when he saw the phantom funeral train wind slowly round the Abbey walls, and the shadowy bier, on which lay the seeming body of Kit himself, listened with breathless attention. When she had finished, he asked her; without much thought of the necessity of his question, "What had brought her there?"

"I hardly know," replied Madge, mournfully; "but I had the conceit that you, or some of you, had played me an ill trick, in leaving me to count the death-throes of that fiend-tormented man, and to mark how he wrestled with them."

"Well, well," said De Clare, impatiently, "to thy bed, now, old crone, and warm thee, for the night is cold, and thou art weary with much watching."

"I am indeed weary," answered Madge, "but it is of life;" and she sighed heavily. "To bed, say you, for the night is cold—ay, and warm me by the colder limbs of my Marian!—Well, 'tis fit I sleep with her this night, for to-morrow they bury her, and the next day—I wish I could weep—or rave, or any thing, to get room for my heart, it beats so thick—but I cannot; my eyes are as sore as this staff I lean upon.—To my bed, say you—in sooth, you are right—you shall not bid me twice, as I did Marian, to keep in her bed, when I left her where I never saw her again, till these hands laid her there—a

corpse! I go, but look ye to it—he lies bleeding,—and though I pass his door, I will not lift the latch, if doing so would recall yesterday for him.”

The poor crazed creature then slowly withdrew, still muttering to herself incoherent phrases about her Marian, or the last struggles of Kit Barnes. She was followed by some three or four of her own sex, neighbours, who knew her, and pitied her condition.

“It amazes me,” said Walwyn, after she was gone, “that a mind, so manifestly shaken as hers is, should have method enough to relate, in the way she did, the circumstances of Kit’s death.”

“It is often thus,” observed De Clare. “The particular grief that unseats our reason, never after presents itself, but to confirm, and triumph in, its mastery; while in its absence, the deposed monarch re-assumes his state, and, for the time, rules his vassal thoughts with as well ordered sway, as he was ever wont to do in his pride of power.”

Fitz-Maurice, who had paused for a moment when he first saw Madge, and who afterwards listened to her wild tale leaning against his palfrey, with his arm thrown carelessly over its neck, now mounted, and without saying a word, but waving his hand in token of farewell to Peverell and the rest, galloped off, followed by his dwarf. The people, who were assembled, watched them with wondering eyes, as far as the darkness would permit.

“Where goes he to-night?” said Vehan, addressing Peverell.

“I could tell thee, as soon, where the arrow falleth that flieth i’ the dark; or one of those stars, whither it goes, when shooting through the air,” replied Peverell.

“Thou know’st him not, then?” observed De Clare.

“There will be another time,” answered Peverell, “for telling you to what my knowledge of him extends: it is meet we now resolve how to bestow the body of our lost friend. Were it better we do as Fitz-Maurice said, leave him till morning, or have him conveyed hence now?”

“He will take no cold, I warrant, between this and sunrise,” observed Overbury. “He’ll wait till he is fetched, and come when he is sent for. There he sits, just where I placed him, in his chair; and looks like the giver of a feast, when the banquet is over, reckoning the

cost, with not a guest remaining to make him smile or forget the amount.—Leave him there: he'll not be frightened because he is alone, though his manhood fell flat in the midst of us."

No one noticed this brutal jeering of Overbury; not even Owen Rees, whose memory was tenacious of the affront that had been put upon him by this demi-savage, and who still hoped to pick a quarrel with him, which might give fair excuse for revenging it. He had been made to swallow the "mountain goat" which Overbury threw in his teeth, but it by no means sat easy upon his stomach.

"I think," said Walwyn, "we cannot do better than as Fitz-Maurice directed. There would be much difficulty, I apprehend, in removing the body to-night; for the mere fact of his death, how truly soever explained, would terrify those, whose assistance we should need, out of all condition to render it. In the morning, due preparations can be made for its removal; and mean while, Mortimer, as his nearest friend, and an intimate of the family, will make known the disastrous event."

Mortimer signified his ready assent to do what was required of him, and the rest concurred in the propriety of Walwyn's suggestion.

"But we must not leave him thus," observed Hoskyns—the first words he had spoken since he pressed Fitz-Maurice to "receive his challenge."

"Assuredly not," replied Lacy. "It would look like mockery—a scurvy jeer, unbecoming men, who *are* men, to leave him in the attitude of life, in cold-hearted derision, as it were, of the life that has perished."

The tone with which Lacy uttered these words, sufficiently indicated for whom they were meant. Nor was Overbury so dull, to require an interpreter; but the rebuke fell upon his rugged spirit, as the prayer of a captive would, whose ingots were not attainable till he had cut the throat of the suppliant.

"Bah!" he exclaimed in a half growl to himself; "a dead man's flesh fattens crows, but keeps courtesy as lean as a beggar's boon."

Lacy led the way, and they returned into the Abbey; where, having performed the sad office of placing the corpse of Wilkins as decently as they could, upon chairs, covering his face with his mantle, and extinguishing the

tapers, they once more left it, Peverell locking the doors, and taking charge of the keys.

It was now nearly two o'clock, yet there were hundreds of the townspeople, waiting to see them come forth, and eager to learn some tidings of what had taken place. Their eagerness, indeed, was the greater, because, it appeared from their account, that not a sound or sight had manifested itself, during the whole time, to those who were on the outside. They gained nothing, however, to take off the edge of their curiosity. Some few among them, who were more importunate than the rest, were silenced, at once, by De Clare.

"We are not your deputies, sent by you, to do your work: ye are not our masters, to put us to the question. What you would know, seek; but seek it not here. Carry your valiant selves whither we have been: and if ye return no wiser than ye go, perchance ye may learn of us what you desire, or the town-crier shall proclaim it to you, to-morrow, in the market-place."

They slunk away from this haughty rebuff, like so many school boys, who, intent upon robbing an orchard, find the owner of it there, ready to inquire the object of their visit.

"I'll not be put off so, come noon," quoth one, "for I espy John Wintour; and it shall go hard, but the price of a pot of ale will pay for more secrets at *The Rose*, than yon churl could tell if he would."

"Is it agreed," said De Clare, as they proceeded along to the mayor's house, "that we obey the injunction of Fitz-Maurice, each man his finger on his lip?"

"It were better thus, I think," replied Peverell. "I know not how it is with all of you, as respects this man, but for myself, albeit no credulous fool of preternatural sympathies, yet I do confess he sways my judgment most strangely."

"And mine, too," said Clayton, who had lost the faculty of speech, since Overbury's sneeze and Mortimer's shoe, upon their first entrance into the Abbey, had made him vocal. Even now, his "and mine, too," was rather the breathing of a sigh, than the utterance of so many words.

The simple question we have to resolve," said Walwyn, "is this. The untimely fate of Wilkins cannot be

concealed, nor can his death be explained, but by the admitting of sufficient circumstance. With what colour, and with what extenuation that degree of confession shall be made; comprises all that need form the matter of present debate. Now, my advice would be, let De Clare, who hath a ready wit to play the oracle, and dexterously to put aside, with seeming answers, a too eager questioning, as he hath shown but now, in his repulse of the people's curiosity, should be our mouth, and speak for us after his own fashion."

"Good," replied Hoskyns; "and we, like his priests, will pronounce only as he inspires us."

The suggestion of Walwyn was approved by all but Overbury, who grumbled something about "making themselves minnows to the whale, and that he, for his part, should speak what he would, and of whom he would."

"I accept mine office," said De Clare, "for it is my humour to play with men's desires, and make them my fool. They shall get from me enough, and no more, to grow wise in their own conceit; but nothing to tell, except by their own invention. And, to be free with you, I like this Fitz-Maurice well, an' it be only that he has a spice of that quality in him which makes his depth beyond every man's line to fathom."

They now arrived at the house of the mayor, whom they found waiting for their coming.

"I marvel," said De Clare, the moment they were seated, "how your worship, at your time of life, and with your growing infirmities, can dally with the hours thus, and deny yourself needful rest."

His worship perceived the drift of this piece of irony, and endeavoured to parry it.

"Your wonder is just," he replied, "and I ought to have been asleep three or four hours since; but mine is a wayward body,—like a testy babe, that will and will not. I overpassed my usual hour of going to bed, in receiving you to-night: and so, because the child was disappointed then, it hath since refused to leave its froward word; my spirit is drowsy"—and he forced a yawn, "but mine eyes watch."

"It is a drowsy time o' the night," answered De Clare, "and sleep sits heavy on us all; we will leave, therefore."

It was not for this that his worship had kept his eyes open, and his curiosity awake.

"Nay," said he, "now thou art come, impart—impart—you have something to tell, I dare be sworn, besides how you liked my wines, and approved my dishes."

"Why, yes," observed De Clare; "we have feasted our eyes and ears, as well as our palates."

"As how?" quoth the mayor.

"Have you not been near the Abbey since we left?" inquired De Clare.

"No, by my faith."

"Nor once sent your waiting man, to bring you tidings."

"The varlet!" exclaimed his worship; "I had no more control over him than a hind has over the pig he is driving. My authority prevailed not with him; no, nor the promise of the stocks. 'Crab,' said I, 'go thy ways to the Abbey, learn what thou can'st, and return quickly with thy news!' 'Master,' said he, 'have you a heart?' and down he dropped on his knees—'Bid me starve—I'll do't—have me whipped—I'll bear't; hang me by the neck till I am half dead, I'll not cry oh! nay, whole hang me, an' you will,—but as you are a Christian man and a mayor, do not say go to the Abbey, which is worse than starving, whipping, and half-hanging, and no better than whole hanging.' And I protest," continued his worship, "I could, by no manner of entreaty or command, get him forth."

"Then, in fine," said De Clare, "you know nothing of what has happened?"

"Nothing," answered the mayor.

"There be some secrets," rejoined De Clare, "which men never tell; and some, which they never know. The first are the last."

"This is a riddle, and not an answer," said his worship.

"It is an answer, and not a riddle," replied De Clare.

"You are in a merry vein, I think," observed his worship, a little nettled at being thus played with.

"Not I, by the rood," replied De Clare. "I am not given to mirth, at any hour of the four and twenty, and should wonder at myself if I could play the antic now."

"How is it, gentlemen," said the mayor, addressing

the rest, "that I am doffed thus,—fobbed, and put back with crafty devices?"

"To the point, then," exclaimed De Clare, seeing his worship began to wax angry. "You would know our mystery; but being a mystery, how shall it become a plain tale of unvarnished truth?—Thus accoutred, it were a mystery no longer. We have seen and heard, what it would defy all the bishops in this fair realm to make us not believe. How, if I tell you the very order of events? It may mar the future; for there hangs a future on this night which must tell itself. Think not it is your discretion to use, or your right to know, what I could unfold, that I question. Here is my proof of confidence in both—Walter Wilkins is dead. He lies yonder in the Abbey, as true a corpse as any that its walls contain. That fear, which wisely kept you at home, hath, in its effect, kept him there."

"Dead!" exclaimed the mayor, casting his eyes upon those present, as if to verify, or otherwise, what De Clare had said.

"Ay, dead," continued De Clare; "and yet, for aught that really happened to put life in jeopardy, he might have ta'en his seat here as we do now. But so it is: men find their graves where they do not look for them, and look for them, oftentimes, where they are not. The soldier comes back from the field of carnage to tell of his escapes, while the keen sportsman springs from this world into the next, in o'er-leaping a fence only. Your man of travel tempts the treacherous seas, the devouring quicksand, and tempestuous winds; braves perils on shore, from the robber prowling in silent ambush, from plague or pestilence, that walks unseen, and from the rude hand of tyrannous power; but he returns to read a younger brother's epitaph, perchance, who, in the time, hath sickened of the ague, and added one more to an already overcrowded church-yard. And thus we walk along the slippery edge of life, dropping, we know not when, into the huge gulf of eternity that yawns beneath our feet."

It was De Clare's object, in thus moralizing the death of Wilkins, the knowledge of which he could not withhold to any profitable end, to turn the mayor's thoughts from their previous current. Nor did he fail, for his worship, quite overcome by the suddenness of the disastrous

communication, dwelt only upon the event itself, and its melancholy character, without once again adverting to the cause. De Clare, indeed, gave him no leisure to do so; for, rising from his seat, as did the rest, he commended his worship to his pillow, and they departed.

"And now, gentlemen," said Walwyn, addressing them, as they were about to separate for their several homes, "what do we determine upon as respects to-morrow? Nothing, I suppose?"

"Yes, one thing," interrupted Lacy, "and that is, that my house be the place of meeting, if there be occasion, as surely there must be, again to confer upon this matter."

"Willingly, say I," replied De Clare; "and as I am your oracle, and you all speak through me, my ay carries with it a common assent. Beyond that, *I answer no*, too,—for we must shape our course as events shape themselves."

With this understanding they separated, each revolving in his mind, with reflections such as belonged to his individual qualities, the things he had witnessed.

Peverell and Clayton walked together.

"What think you now?" said the latter, after a pause.

"E'en what I thought from the beginning," answered Peverell; "that you and I, as we saw the first, must see the last. Mind you—I speak this with no brag—not I, by my soul; but from a rooted persuasion in my own mind, a growing conviction, an irresistible impression,—or call it by what name you will,—that we were not selected to open this drama, and be dropped in its progress."

"Think of poor Wilkins," replied Clayton.

"True," said Peverell; "and while I see natural causes to explain his lamentable end, I mourn it as a calamity, but take from it no warning."

"Natural enough!" exclaimed Clayton. "I only wonder we are not all by his side, instead of coming out alive."

"Now you speak," said Peverell. "You have hit it in the right point. We *have* all come out alive, and, bating your wonder, it is the very reason why we should all go in again."

"In again!" ejaculated Clayton.

"Ay, and again, and again, and again," added Peverell, "till we can tell why we have gone at all. Look ye, good friend. In the first place, I do not think there is another Wilkins among us, to be merely frightened out of this world; and in the second, I do not think all the powers of darkness, if they be really at work in this business, can produce such another night of horror. We have seen the worst; and the worst that can now come, will find us, therefore, all the better prepared."

"Then there's poor Kit Barnes," continued Clayton; "he is dead, too."

"I will suppose," said Peverell, after a pause, "that he beheld but a tithe part of what he did, and then say he was *alone*, and what marvel, I pray you, is there in his case? Had his mind been the counterpart of his body, it might have stood the shock; but it was of sickly growth, pampered with vain fancies, the offspring of a misconceived holiness, which transformed into a martyrdom, in his conceit, what was simply a trial of humanity. Such natures are of too brittle a quality to endure a rough handling of the imagination."

"Well," responded Clayton, "you may talk as you will; but that which was enough to kill Kit Barnes, and Walter Wilkins, will be as much as is required to do for Hugh Clayton, I reckon."

Peverell could not forbear laughing, as he replied, "Why, man, you are a living contradiction of your own doctrine. That which *did* kill them, has *not* killed you."

"No," said Clayton; "but that only proves I take a great deal of killing."

"Come, come, friend," answered Peverell, "this is unprofitable talk; you have more than that man in you, than you give yourself credit for; and I do not think, on my soul, if I were now to bid you proceed no farther in this business, you would accept the opportunity of leaving it."

"Indeed I would," said Clayton, "if you tacked to your invitation your own resolution of leaving it."

"That is impossible!" replied Peverell, with great earnestness.

"Then I am with you, come foul or fair," rejoined Clayton, with equal earnestness.

Peverell was touched with this honest display of warm and friendly attachment; and taking him kindly by the hand, as they arrived at Clayton's door,

"Good night," said he. "*I* do not consider this a service of peril, but *you* do: and by your own estimate of it, not mine, I measure the value of your regard for me in it. Good night, and good sleep attend you."

Peverell soon reached his own home; and nearly as soon had the benefit of his parting benediction to his friend; for, exhausted by the long agitation of his feelings, he speedily sunk into a "good sleep" himself, from which he did not awake till an hour much later than his usual one of rising.



CHAPTER X.

ON the following morning the intelligence of Wilkins' death soon diffused itself, for Mortimer lost no time in fulfilling the office with which he had charged himself. It was (as he had truly enough predicted, when he provoked the glibbing retort of De Clare) a heavy hour for the widowed, and now childless, mother of Wilkins. He was her only remaining offspring; the last of four sons and three daughters, the former of whom, except this ill-starred one, had all found honourable graves in battle, while the latter had each dropped off in the fair blossom of youth, or just ripening into womanly perfection. Walter, it was true, owed more to his purse than to his head, for what consideration he enjoyed: but in his heart, filial love and tenderness were a living spring, from whose source the current of his every action towards his mother took its rise. And whatever the world might say or think, the venerable Winifred Wilkins never laid her aged head upon her pillow, without acknowledging, to the Giver of all good, her pious gratitude for the blessing of so kind and affectionate a son.

Immediate directions were issued for the removal of the body from the Abbey; and they to whom they were issued applied to Peverell for the keys. He chose rather to accompany them; as much from feelings of respect towards the deceased, as from a reluctance to expose to li-

centious and unwatched intrusion, the scene of such mysteries as those of the preceding night. Mingled with these feelings, too, there was a degree of curiosity again to look upon it himself, in the broad glare of day, and divested of all its gloomy auxiliaries.

When they entered the Abbey, Peverell was much perplexed by a circumstance which, however, he had self-command enough to observe in silence. Either he had totally forgotten how and where the body of Wilkins had been placed, or both had undergone a change. The latter he deemed impossible; and yet the former he strongly doubted. He remembered, distinctly, having assisted Lacy, De Clare, Hoskyns, and Owen Rees in so disposing of it on the chairs, that the head was towards the north, and the feet towards the south wall, whereas now, it lay in the direction of east and west. His mantle, too, had fallen from off his face, and the chairs themselves were at a greater distance from the table than they had left them. "I cannot surely be mistaken," he thought, "for there stood Hoskyns and Lacy—and there Owen Rees and De Clare—and here (planting his foot on a particular spot,) I myself placed this chair, to support his head. I remember, at the time, observing the fine effect produced by the fitful gleams of light as they plashed upon yonder window from a nearly extinguished taper, which I could not have seen had I stood here; and De Clare, in assisting to raise his feet, brushed from the table that cup, which still lies there, and which could not have happened if he had been thus placed. Yet I must be mistaken, for it is mere ecstasy to imagine—out upon it—I shall grow ashamed of my own weakness."

These thoughts passed through Peverell's mind, while those who had come with him were busied in making the requisite preparations for removing the body. Many of the townspeople had accompanied them, and others had afterwards arrived; and Peverell could not help contrasting the comparatively cheerful scene then before him (in spite of the one melancholy object) with the gloom and terror of the night before. Busy human faces, the hum of careless voices, the tread of many feet, and, above all, a bright and glorious morning sun streaming through the windows, were so unlike what had been their own anxious countenances, half-whispered words, measured footsteps, and

dimly burning tapers, to say nothing of what their eyes beheld and their ears heard, that he could not notice what would infallibly have struck him under other circumstances, the timid glances and mysterious shrugs of those whom daylight had inspired with sufficient courage to cross the portentous threshold.

His attention was now excited by another circumstance: the extraordinary change which had taken place in the body of Wilkins. Instead of presenting the appearance of a man suddenly struck by death, in the prime of life, and the full vigour of health, it might have been supposed, not only that he had lingered through a long disease, but that the first process of decay had commenced ere he died. Nay, had he lain in the earth as many weeks as he had lain hours, only, in the Abbey, he could not have been more pestiferous to the smell, or more loathsome to the eye. His flesh was one putrid mass of dissolving jelly; his face livid, with here and there broad blotches of cadaverous green; his features bore no distinguishable resemblance to what had been their character in life; while the black mark round his throat, which had been observed in the first instance, had eaten itself, as it were, into a trench or gash of fluid corruption. Altogether, the spectacle was most hideous to the sight, and most abhorrent to the imagination. The gorge of Peverell rose, as he contemplated it; and it was an infinite relief to his feelings, when, all the necessary preparations having been made, the men slowly conveyed the body from the Abbey. Peverell again locked the doors, and returned home.

With regard to poor Kit Barnes, as he had neither kin nor kind—no creature near him, in whose veins ran a drop of kindred blood, Peverell took upon himself the charge of having him decently consigned to the grave.

Mean while, these two lamentable events, the deaths of Wilkins and Kit Barnes, with the circumstances that accompanied, and the supposed causes that had produced them, related, of course, with such an extra seasoning of the super-marvellous as was natural, where the exact truth could not be known, became the theme of every tongue in St. Albans. De Clare, Mortimer, Lacy, Clayton, and Peverell, were visited, throughout the day, by intimate friends, loose acquaintance, and familiar strangers, who employed every ingenious device, from a seemingly care-

less, "now pray do not say a word if it disquiets you—for I merely called by chance, as it were," down to an affectionate assurance of—"I know I have your confidence, and *you* know how entirely you can rely on my discretion," to extract from them some indirect hint or special note of the affair. But the pact between them had been too deliberately made, to admit of its evasion lightly. Besides, most men cling to the importance which the possession of an incommunicable secret confers.

Mine host, John Wintour, had his share of temptation, too; and he could not remember the day when so much strong ale, small ale, double beer, and single beer, had been drunk at *The Rose*. But honest Jack, (as the frequenters of his house called him,) who was a wag in his own sphere, contrived, with much dexterity, to keep them off from his mystery, and to keep them on to their drink. He had an eye to his score, or prompt payment, in all his answers.

"Why, look ye, my masters," he would say, when he perceived an empty pot, "I am one who cannot neglect the main chance; and when, therefore, a stray chance falls in my way, which may help the other, I use it accordingly. Now it was one of these stray chances, as I call them, which carried me, last night, into such good company; and, for ~~my~~ part, they who call for my ale, have the best right, to my thinking, to call for whatever else I can give them."

"You speak like an honest man, and a good tapster," quoth the tipplers; "here, fill this stoup again, and then for it."

"Anon," said mine host; and in the twinkling of an eye, there was a goodly array of foaming flagons on the table.

"By my faith, here be more company," he would then exclaim, (as in truth, there were fresh comers every moment,) and forth he sallied to give them due reception; always observing on these occasions, "that one telling would do for all, an' he could once see the end of their coming." He was tolerably well convinced, and moreover devoutly hoped, that no such end was near: and thus he managed to feed expectation, without ever once giving a meal to curiosity.

It might be about noon, and *The Rose* overflowing with

guests, when a traveller stopped at the door, and inquired, if he were on the road to St. Albans.

"No," said mine host, "you are not."

"Will you put me in the way then?" quoth the stranger. "A misbegotten knave, as I passed through Dunstable, (so I think you call the nearest town between here and Northampton,) told me this morning, if I kept straight onwards, I should find St. Albans by the time my stomach cared to find its dinner; but I have walked many a weary mile since."

"He was no misbegotten knave," replied mine host, a merry twinkle sparkling in his eyes; "but a true man, for he told you right. You are not on the road to St. Albans; and why? because you have arrived at St. Albans; and if thy stomach hath found its appetite for a dinner, I am he who will find a dinner for thy appetite."

"Say you so," answered the traveller, "have with you then, and cook me a mess with your best speed; for I am as ravenous as a wild cat, and not nice in the matter of my food, whereto my hunger shall be the best sauce."

He entered forthwith, took his seat among those who were already there, and called for a pot of ale, which he drank with the keen relish of one whom thirst, as well as hunger, had besieged.

"This is brave liquor," quoth he, smacking his lips, after a draught which uncovered the bottom of the vessel; "but I might have remembered the adage, *good wine needs no bush*. When you see a full hive," he continued, looking round at the company, "you may always trust to the honey."

His speech denoted that he was from the north country, and his appearance, that he was no summer fly. His beard was tawny and thick, but stunted in its growth. His make square and sinewy, and his age, seemingly, that of the middle period of life; while his dress bespoke about the same degree of condition. He carried a stout staff to help him on his journey, or, as it might fall out, to knock a fellow over the head who gave him offence. The plight of his boots was an evidence that he had trudged more than a few miles along very dirty roads. In paying for his ale, however, which he did on the instant, he drew forth a purse from his girdle, which satisfied mine host of two things—first, that he had not been robbed by the

way; and, secondly, that he had wherewithal to be robbed of.

His meal was soon ready, which he quickly despatched; and calling for some more ale, stretched himself at his ease on the bench, and began to trol the old ballad of—

“When Arthur first in courts began,
And was approved king.”

“Your spirits flag not,” quoth mine host, addressing the traveller, “whate’er thy limbs may do.”

“No,” replied Fortescue, (for that was his name); “I carry a light heart in this heavy world, and I laud the gods for it. It is better than house and land; for they may pass from you, but a brisk mind still flies above the cares of life.”

“They say care killed a cat once,” observed a starveling weaver, who sat near.

“Good goose, bite not,” said mine host.

“Nay,” interrupted Fortescue, falling at once into the humour of the discourse, “what is there more wonderful in care killing a cat, than in good liquor making a goose speak?”

This conceit, poor as it was, pleased the fancies of those who heard it, and provoked a hearty laugh at the expense of the unfortunate weaver.

“Blessing of your heart, you brew good ale, my friend?” continued Fortescue, finishing his second flagon; “it is no sooner in the stomach than it is up in the head. But I must to it again; so bring another, and let me see thee drink the first, for they say ’tis a bad cook that cannot lick his own fingers.”

Both commands were quickly obeyed by Wintour, and as he placed the ale before Fortescue, after a potation which showed that he had no distrust of his own liquor, he asked him if he were journeying onwards, or meant to abide the rest of the day at St. Alban’s?

“To speak truly,” replied Fortescue, “I am not yet resolved. I am already foot-sore, and for mine own ease, care not to budge farther at present; but I am on an errand, in the fulfilling of which thou, perhaps, canst render me some service.”

“Master Wintour,” said one of the company, “dost thou forget? An’ we drink much more, all the goblins in

Christendom could not keep our ears awake. Come, your tale, Master Wintour; let us have your tale, Master Wintour."

"Marry, and you shall have it," answered Wintour; "but be patient, my masters, be patient. See you not I have an affair in hand that will not wait?"

"Oh," interrupted Fortescue, "an' two men ride of a horse, one must needs ride behind, you know. Let me and my affairs, therefore, be second in your kind offices. What tale is this they claim at your hands? I love a merry tale; 'tis medicine for a jaded body."

"Then you must excuse me," said Wintour; "mine is no merry tale, but one as dark as winter; and, certes, no medicine for a jaded body, though like enough to prove physic to a nimble spirit."

"Better still," replied Fortescue. "Your judicious discords make sweet music; and though I am ever for laughing rather than crying, yet I can be sorrowful like a true gentleman, and sigh away Sundays to psalm tunes."

Mine host was now in a corner, and knew not, for a moment, by what trick or contrivance to escape. But his invention did not wholly forsake him.

"You are from the north?" said he, addressing Fortescue.

"Ay, from Northumberland."

"I thought so: and your name—"

"Reginald Fortescue; at your service."

"Fortescue! Is that a north country name?"

"It is my name, and, therefore, a north country name."

"When did you leave Northumberland?"

"Ten days since."

"And have you walked all the way?"

"Ay—every inch of it."

"And you are going—"

"Upon an errand."

"Which, as I guess," interrupted mine host, "you will not impart?"

"Which, as I guess," replied Fortescue, "concerns not thee to know."

"Why, look you now, how cholerick you are!" said Wintour, "I pry into no man's secrets, not I."

"No," answered Fortescue, "you do not pry—you would take them by storm."

"I crave your pardon," quoth mine host, "if I am too unmannerly: but all hoods make not monks, you know."

"I do not take your meaning," said Fortescue, seemingly angered.

"Then my cake is dough," answered Wintour; "you should be a shrewd man from your nativity—but I have sowed cockle, and reap no corn."

The look which accompanied these words was not lost upon Fortescue. He read its whole meaning at once.

"To your tale," said he, "and let us have no feud. I am not quarrelsome, nor will I be provoked into a fray. Your tale, I pray thee."

"Ay, your tale, your tale, good master Wintour," responded several voices.

"With right good will," said mine host; "so lend me your ears, an' you please."

All was silent, and Wintour began:—

"You know, my masters, what marvellous sights we have seen, of late, at the Abbey?"

"Yes, yes," they exclaimed; "never mind them; give us last night."

"Your pardon," said Fortescue, "I am a stranger here. What Abbey, and what sights do you mean?" he continued, addressing himself to Wintour.

Mine host was delighted. He saw that his drift had been rightly conceived by Fortescue.

"You say true," quoth he: "it is fitting you should know the beginning, or how can you comprehend the end?"

"Nay," said one, "an' you mean to tell us all we can tell thee, it will be an hour or twain, ere you come to the marrow of thy tale."

"By your leave," answered Wintour. "I will be brief; but do not break in upon me, for I have a slender wit, that will not bear the being crossed. See, now, how you have perplexed me."

"Go your own gait," said Fortescue, "and you'll be at your journey's end all the sooner."

"I must do so," replied Wintour. "Well, then, it was only five nights ago—five nights, do I say—let me

correct myself: no—it was only four nights—yes—that is the true computation—four nights ago, that one Hugh Clayton, a worthy man of this town, returning from Dunstable, where you were this morning,” (addressing Fortescue) “in company with another worthy townsman, his sworn friend—one Marmaduke Peverell—”

“Marmaduke Peverell!” exclaimed Fortescue. “Is he alive, and still dwelling here?”

“Ay, that he was, but two hours since, I’ll swear, upon the faith of my own eyes,” replied Wintour, “for I saw him. Do you know Marmaduke?”

“Is he from Durham?” inquired Fortescue.

“By my faith, I cannot answer thee that,” said Wintour; “but why do you ask?”

“For the satisfaction of my journey—no less,” answered Fortescue. “I am the bearer of a packet for one Marmaduke Peverell, whom, as I was instructed, ere I set out, I should find at St. Albans, an’ he were not dead; but where I should certainly learn tidings of him, if he sojourned elsewhere. Can this be the same?”

“I can tell you it is,” said an old man, who sat in one corner of the room; “so far, at least, as that this Marmaduke Peverell is of Durham: for I remember his coming to this town; and, in my dealings with him, have often heard him speak of Durham as the place where he first cried.”

“Then I have sped well,” observed Fortescue, “in taking up my quarters here. In what part of the town does this same Marmaduke Peverell dwell?”

“Hard by,” replied Wintour. “A man shall hardly sneeze thrice, ere one despatched to his house would return.”

“Have you a trusty messenger,” inquired Fortescue, “by whom I could send this?” drawing forth a small sealed packet.

“I will be the bearer of it myself,” replied mine host, right glad of an office which cut short a tale he meant not to tell, but found it more and more difficult to evade.

“You have my thanks,” said Fortescue. “I am weary, and, moreover, care not to disturb my present ease; but, hark ye, that there may be no mistake, (for this Marmaduke Peverell may not be the one I am sent to find, although there be such strong circumstance to warrant

him so,) inquire of him if he knows Martin Cuthbert, of Halifax, the rich clothier, fifth or fiftieth cousin, I mind not which, to John Byram, of Kendal, of the same craft. If he say ay, give him this, and bring him along, should he wish to have conversation with me, forthwith; but he may choose his time, for I shall not away again till to-morrow."

"I'll do it, as you desire," quoth Wintour, and immediately left the room. In a few minutes afterwards, all the rest departed, hopeless now of hearing what they sought, and having besides their several callings to pursue. Fortescue alone remained.

Wintour found Peverell at home, and soon delivered him of his errand.

"Ay, truly," said Peverell, when mine host had finished, "I know Martin Cuthbert, of Halifax, though it is long since I had any news of him. He is my kinsman; and when I stood no higher than his knee, would pat me on the head, and tell me I should be remembered in his will. Belike he is dead—he must have been hard upon fourscore and ten,—and this is to advise me of it."

Peverell broke the seal of the packet, which contained a small scroll of parchment. Unfolding this, he started, as his eyes hastily perused whatever were the words written on it; then, suddenly turning round to Wintour, he inquired, with an eager voice, "who was the messenger that brought it?"

"I have told you," said Wintour; "a foot traveller, of mean condition, rather than otherwise, who came last from Dunstable, which he left this morning."

"I know—I know," interrupted Peverell, hastily; "but his manner—his words—his looks—what are they?"

"You might guess him for one no better than myself," replied Wintour,—"a plain-spoken, and homely-mannered person."

"And where is he?"

"At my house, waiting my return from this errand of his, which he had discharged himself, but that he is weary, and at his ease."

"I must see him," said Peverell, "and that without delay." So saying, he set forth, leaving mine host to follow, who, being somewhat of the corpulent, and pursy

withal, could not move along quite so nimbly as Peverell, who was, besides, urged into quicker speed by his intensely excited feelings.

When Wintour arrived, he found Peverell standing at the door, looking with an eager eye, first in one direction and then in another.

"He is gone!" he exclaimed, in a tone of mingled amazement and vexation.

"Gone," echoed Wintour. "Whither?"

"Ay, *whither?*" repeated Peverell, emphatically;—"tell me that, and tell me all!"

Inquiry was now made by Wintour, but no one had seen Fortescue depart.

"The scurvy rogue," muttered mine host, "he might have paid his last score, like an honest man, had he been one, before he went."

Peverell still held the packet in his hand, and seemed buried in thought.

"Meet me, an hour hence?" said he, after a pause, addressing Wintour, "at Lacy's; we shall have business there. And canst thou undertake to give notice of the same to Overbury and Owen Rees? The others I will acquaint with the necessity of their presence."

Wintour promised to do his part, and Peverell left him.



CHAPTER XI.

At the appointed time, they were all assembled at Benjamin Lacy's; and Peverell, addressing himself to Wintour, bade him relate, with as much of minute circumstance as he could, all that had occurred, from the first moment of Fortescue's arrival at his house, to that wherein he despatched him with the packet for himself.

Wintour performed the task thus enjoined him, and detailed, with great exactness, the circumstances of Fortescue's coming to *The Rose*, and all that took place, down to his own going to Peverell with the packet.

"And this," said Peverell, when Wintour had finished, "this is the missive he brought me; its contents are soon mastered, as ye shall hear." He then drew forth the scroll of parchment, and read the following words, which were inscribed upon it in bright purple letters:

**"When the chimes go nine,
Then look for the sign."**

"I had no sooner perused this enigma," continued Peverell, "than I hastened to Wintour's house, expecting, I confess, what I found—that the bearer of it was gone; and so he was, unobserved of any."

The parchment passed from hand to hand, each, as he received it, examining, with profound attention, the mysterious words. Overbury and mine host, indeed, were observed to hold it upside down; but they did not, therefore, bestow a less seeming scrutiny upon the inscription.

"Who is the *Cædipus* among us," said De Clare, after a pause, "to solve this riddle?"

"That am I, methinks," replied Walwyn, "and it is thus. At nine o'clock, in the Abbey, or on the outside, there shall be some appearance manifest itself, by which we may know what it is necessary we should do. You see I am beginning to play the old woman," he continued, smiling, "and treat this matter with a superstitious feeling; yet it is not so: at least my tongue will not confess so much."

"Have you seen Fitz-Maurice to-day?" said Lacy, addressing Peverell,

"No," replied Peverell.

"Nor heard from him?" added Lacy.

"Nor heard from him," said Peverell.

"I am to be informed, ere the sun goes down," observed Walwyn, "whether he returns to us."

"And you *will* be informed," replied Peverell; "be certain of it."

"By the same token," added De Clare, "we are to have signs."

"But you must *watch* for them," replied Walwyn; "and it was with this enigma in my memory, that I attempted to solve the one now before us,"

"I confess," said Peverell, addressing Walwyn, "I think you have penetrated the meaning of these lines, though I saw it not. The Abbey, the Abbey is the place."

"Who and what is this Fitz-Maurice?" exclaimed De Clare.

"I will tell you," said Peverell, "the full extent of my knowledge;" and he related all that has been already described. "What followed after this interview," he continued, "passed under your own eyes; for I saw him not again, till we met last night at the Abbey door."

"He is a miraculous fellow, I protest," said Mortimer, when Peverell concluded, "and just the terrible sort of dragon we need; but I wish we were all as well provided as he is, with his periapt."

"It is most apparent," added Hoskyns, "that he hath the gift of prophecy in him—the power of reading the future—by whatever means possessed—holy or otherwise."

"No," replied De Clare, "it is not yet apparent that he hath this gift, though circumstances go near to the proof of it. But for these words," he continued, addressing Walwyn, "which I have been weighing in my mind, I do not expound them as you have done. My conclusion would be, that we should commence our watchings in the Abbey, this night, somewhat before the hour of nine, and that then and there, signs shall be made manifest to us."

"I am with you in that interpretation," said Lacy.

"and I, too," added Vehan.

"I am for any interpretation," observed Peverell, "that brings us to the Abbey by the hour named."

The same sentiments were expressed by the rest.

"Well, gentlemen," said Walwyn, "there goes but a pair of shears between us, as the saying is; and I lose no feather, decide as you may, for either your oracle, or your *Œdipus*. Let it be agreed, then, that we assemble at the time proposed by De Clare: and it will be the better, perhaps, for other reasons, inasmuch as it will be done more privily."

Should we not apprize the mayor of our intention?" said Owen Rees.

"Assuredly," replied Lacy, "it will be but an act of becoming courtesy; besides, we have his promise to

furnish us with the rare produce of his cellar, and the dainties of his kitchen, and other commodities, to make the service we are upon more tolerable."

"His worship is most bountiful," said De Clare; "but he has only to call this a business that concerns the public good; and so write, in his charge of office, *Item, for wine drunk, and provisions eaten, by Nicholas Mortimer, and eleven others,—(naming us all)—while laying the foul fiend of the Abbey church.* Thus shall he show himself no less a prudent man than a vigilant magistrate, by returning to the pocket of the former, what was taken out of it by the seeming duty of the latter."

"Thou hast a saucy wit," observed Vehan, "thus to vent itself upon the dignity of office."

"Oh," replied De Clare, "'tis the price that greatness pays for its privilege of despising the world. We poor commoners of the state, are *their* aim, and when they hit, they wound us; while our shafts, though they fly thick as hail, pierce not the robes of their authority.—*They* smile; but *we* writhe."

At this moment the door opened, and his worship entered.

"I learned," said he, addressing Lacy, who advanced to receive him, "that you were here in council, and I have used a liberty, which I hope the occasion will excuse, in thus entering."

"You come most opportunely," replied Lacy, "for we were, even now, upon the point of setting forth, to make your worship acquainted with what has passed, and with what is intended."

Lacy then imparted to him their resolution of commencing watch in the Abbey before nine that night, but withheld the circumstance which had occurred to cause that decision.

"The truth is," said De Clare, "we have done this specially for your convenience, that you may have the opportunity, which I know you covet, of being with us. Should aught take place which may suggest the extending of our vigils beyond the chimes of midnight, you shall have free leave to depart; so as not to o'erstay your hour of rest."

"I cry you mercy," answered his worship. "Not I—What should I do there? I should be like an idle specta-

tor who enters the theatre when the last scene of a tragedy he knows not, is playing: all the foregone matter, which explains the end, he hath lost, and so gapes he unprofitably about him. I was not admitted to your secret last night, and by your leave I will not be so to-night. Moreover, I have sundry weighty affairs to despatch, which may not be delayed till to-morrow, or else, I would not swear an oath, I think, against my strong desire to join you. But I'll be your caterer still, and you shall remember me in your cups;—though, alas! I know not with what heart you can quaff wine in that cold, dismal place, and recollect poor Wilkins and Kit Barnes!”

“Therefore it is we *can* quaff it, and need it too,” observed Hoskyns; “for when the blood is chill, wine warms it, and when the spirits fly from the heart, wine drives them back again. As our friend Wilfred Overbury told us last night, a man’s valour doth ever ebb and flow with his stoup of liquor.”

“Ha! ha!” exclaimed Overbury, pleased with this allusion to his words, “said I not right? That poor fool who died, but wetted his lips when he should have drenched his throat; and what was the consequence? The foul fiend fell foul of him, and made him foul enough to boot, as I learn, ere this morning. No, while you live, drown fear in drink, and

“Then fall to work,
Like a devil or Turk.”

“Well,” quoth the mayor, “I have said it, and it shall be done. Nine o’clock, eh? But that matters not,—for whatsoe’er I do, it must be ere nightfall. Would you believe it?—They are such arrant cowards, that not even by virtue of my authority, do I think I could get a man to go into the Abbey after dark? It shall be done, however; it shall all be done.”

After some farther general conversation, in the course of which De Clare, in his usual caustic humour, played with the ill-disguised timidity of his worship, they all departed; it being previously settled they should re-assemble at Lacy’s by eight o’clock in the evening.

When they were gone, Lacy was joined by his daughter Helen. She entered the room with a dejected air, and her eyes were flushed from recent weeping. Helen

Lacy was in her twentieth year, and of a tall, well proportioned figure. Her countenance was more remarkable for intelligent expression, than for what might be called beauty, (though many, with less pretensions, would not have abated their claim even to that quality;) but her mind exceeded all that her countenance indicated. Since the death of her mother, which took place three years before the time we are speaking of, she had presided over her father's house. He had two other daughters, both older than Helen, and both married. He had a son, also, in his twenty-third year, who was then upon his travels, to qualify himself, as was the fashion of his age, for entering into society, with the manners of France and Italy engrafted upon those of his native England; like a doublet of good broad cloth, pranked with copper lace and tawdry points. Helen still kept her maiden condition; not for lack of suitors, but because she loved her father too entirely to give him only a divided heart. She had never declared to him, or to any one, that she would *not* wed while he lived, for words, she knew, were brittle things: she had done better. In the silence of her own thoughts, she had resolved, and she knew her own power to keep her own purpose. From that moment, she admitted of no parley with her resolution.

Helen had received such an education as was usually bestowed on young ladies of her rank, and which did not exclude instruction in the learned languages. She could certainly *read* both Greek and Latin, but had not prosecuted her studies in the writings of Grecian and Roman authors, with sufficient industry to give her a critical knowledge of them, or hardly to enable her to relish their more accessible beauties. French and Italian, also, especially the latter, had occupied her attention, and she delighted in the pages of Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio. With the literature of her own country, she was well acquainted; but her favourite reading, consisted of tales of chivalry and romance, with legends of sorcery, enchanters and magicians. A summer's day would often be too short for her young imagination, when spell-bound by the mysteries of necromancy. She had devoured all such reading with so greedily an appetite, that she could recount, with minute accuracy, the names and properties of every agent of mischief, and the charms they worked with; the

different kinds of devils—fiery, aerial, terrestrial, watery, subterranean; the qualities and appellations of demons; the practices of fairies—benign and malignant, beautiful or ugly; the nocturnal visitations of ghosts; the cabalistic uses of a mummy; the manifold shapes, and hellish devices of witches; why they had beards; how distinguished from conjurers and enchanters; their control over the operations of nature; why the drawing of their blood destroyed their power over man;—in short, the whole secrets of the supernatural and invisible world, as they were believed in that age, and not questioned by herself, were familiar to the wonder-loving mind of Helen.

It may easily be imagined, that with this strong predilection for the marvellous, the indulgence of which had imparted a tone of dark and gloomy enthusiasm to her character, poor Helen, who loved her father as the most cherished object of her gentle heart, looked with dismay upon the enterprise in which he was now engaged. She felt assured his life would be the price of his participation in it; and though he had revealed to her no particle of what had occurred the preceding night, save the death of Wilkins, yet that terrible event, added to the demoniac frenzy which tormented the dying moments of Kit Barnes, were sufficient to denote the existence of a fearful cause, however its quality might be concealed from her.

She had already, with as much pertinacity as a daughter's love, held in check by duty, might warrant, urged her father to renounce the business; but he, who shared none of her superstitious fears, and who would scarcely admit he knew what it was to feel any other kind of fear, mildly, but firmly, resisted all her entreaties. His own heart told him wherefore she entreated; and the tremulous voice and glistening eye, with which, sometimes, he endeavoured to sooth away her affectionate importunities, only deepened the pangs that accompanied them.

She had now come, once more, to try what persuasion would do; and Lacy perceived, with emotions which he struggled to subdue, not only that she had been weeping, but that her spirits were saddened by the thoughts which had taken such strong hold of her mind.

"How many widows and orphans," said she, seating herself calmly by her father, "how many more victims are

to be offered up to this grim devil, or ere he will have blood enough?"

"Hush! my child," replied Lacy, taking her hand; "you must not let these fancies disturb you thus."

"Ay, they do indeed disturb me," answered Helen, with a heavy sigh. "I cannot sleep for them: or if I fall into a perturbed slumber, they haunt me with such horrid visions, that even my waking grief is repose, compared to them. I was too young—a laughing child of thoughtless happiness—when you were amid all the dangers of the field, to know that every hour which passed, might be the one that saw thee bleeding, and me without a father. But I can remember, how my mother used to weep, and how I would wonder at her tears. Alas! she, sainted shade! felt as I now feel,—that each moment of your life might have no fellow to it; and that if she but smiled, while you were away, she might dress a widowed face, perchance, in unbecoming mirth."

This remembrance of her mother—of a wife whom Lacy had tenderly loved, and whose memory was hallowed in his recollection of her virtues, thrilled to his inmost heart. For an instant, he was unable to speak; but subduing his newly awakened sorrow, and pressing the hand of Helen, which he still held in his,

"Have I not assured you," he said, "that your apprehensions of danger are all chimerical, and that they are produced by your fears only, which themselves spring from your affectionate anxiety for me?"

"Yes, you have," mournfully responded Helen.

"And why art thou unconvinced?" added Lacy.

"Because," replied Helen, "I am a woman, I suppose; and a weak creature, withal," wiping away her tears with her handkerchief.

"Nay, nay," said Lacy, "you shall not do yourself that wrong!"

"Well, then," rejoined Helen, "because I lack that breeding which hath fortified your mind. You are a soldier—have been one—since you could brandish a sword: and your whole life has been a school, wherein death was your playmate, and danger your bed-fellow. You have so long learned to live to-day, as if there were no to-morrow in your calendar—so long looked peril in the face, and looked it away, that fear is as a word only, which you

hear men's tongues repeat, but which you never felt nor saw, except in others. I have not been so trained, alas! nor could be, and keep my sex."

"Say I grant you all this," replied Lacy, "and I might do so, nor play the braggart either, what should I, but make an argument in my own behalf, and against yourself?"

"How so?" said Helen, mildly, and with hesitation, as if she feared to triumph.—"They are *my* misgivings, not *yours*, for which I am so bold to become the advocate. I would entreat you to look with my eyes—to yield to my feelings: not to belie your own."

"But should I not then," continued her father, "belie my judgment, or, rather, hood-wink it, because I would not let it lead me right?"

"I did not hope to prevail with you," replied Helen; "nor, perhaps, well considered, ought I. Wherefore doth time stamp wrinkles on our brow, and turn raven locks to snow, if it be not that, as we drift along his ever onward stream, we note the shoals and whirlpools that would wreck the gallant barks behind us, if no warning voice——"

"Mine," interrupted Lacy, "is not a warning voice, for I perceive neither the shoals nor the whirlpools. But, out upon thee!" he continued—"Art thou the Helen Lacy—the daughter of old Benjamin Lacy, who never showed his back where he had once shown his face; and wouldst thou have me now forsake my comrades? No, no, my girl! I have not outlived some score of hot encounters in the angry field, to turn pale in my old age at shadows! You are thinking, I know, of him who died last night. But how then? He would have died this night in his bed, had he heard a death-token behind the arras. This is no augury. Besides, God will, when he will; it is the soldier's creed: no man goes to his grave in December, if 'tis written it shall be dug in May. So your smiles, wench, and let sorrow wait."

Helen was silent. There were things she would have spoken, but she thought they became her not. A speechless prayer to Heaven for her father's safety that night, relieved her heart, and she hoped that night would see the end of all her fears on his account. If not, her next hope was, that from events themselves, she might derive better

arguments to win her purpose. Composing her feelings, therefore, she strove, and not without success, to throw an air of serenity, and even cheerfulness, over her manner, which soon communicated itself to Lacy, who rejoined in the idea that he had dispelled her apprehensions.

The remaining interval till eight o'clock, was passed in various discourse between Helen and her father. As the hour approached, when he expected Peverell and the rest, addressing her gaily, he exclaimed, "What say you, girl? Will you tarry, and see my comrades? They are all tall fellows, I can tell you: as valiant a little regiment as a man need pick, who had sharp work to go about. Ay, and there is one among them, observe, who might creep his way, perchance, into a maiden's heart, if she did not allow her eyes to be purveyor to it."

"What mean you?" said Helen, smiling.

"I mean," replied Lacy, "that if you can dispense with a face, and have no particular inclination for a right inside to a head, he, yclept Wilfrid Overbury, might aspire to call me father."

"I shall not fall in love with your description," answered Helen, playfully, "that is certain: however, when I mean to market for a husband, he may stand his chance with the rest of such horned cattle; or, when I shut my eyes, and cry have me—for have is have, however men do catch—he shall start with others: but not till then, by your good leave."

"Remain, and see him," said Lacy.

"No," replied Helen, "I am not merry, and would not be more sad, which the sight of—pardon me—I am gone." And the tears came in spite of herself, as she pressed her lips to those of her father, and hurried out of the room.

"I cannot chide her," exclaimed Lacy to himself. "It was thus her mother would grieve, as often in my youth and lustihood, as it was my fate to have some service of equal honour and peril bestowed upon me. I remember parting from her, when she went big with this same piece of rare workmanship—'twas her last burden—to take my share of the French wars; and there was more wet in my eyes than beseemed a soldier; but women's sorrows have an infectious quality in them—and that's the truth of it."

He was interrupted in this soliloquy, (and before

he had well brushed away some of that unsoldierly wet he had been talking of, which, as it seemed, still found a channel to his eyes,) by the arrival of De Clare, Peverell, and the rest, who came with such a punctual observance of the time, that there was scarcely five minutes between the entrance of the first and the last.

"I have been using my influence, but ineffectually, as you perceive," said Lacy, after they were seated, "to keep a fair lady here, to grace your coming with her presence; but she would not be persuaded. It wanted a younger tongue than mine; and you," he continued, addressing himself to Mortimer, "were too tardy in presenting yourself."

"I know not how it is," replied Mortimer, "but I swear, by my manhood, I have not the art to prevail with ladies."

"By your manhood, certainly not," observed De Clare; "but I wonder you should fail, notwithstanding, for women are won by trifles."

"Not always," retorted Mortimer, "else, why are you a bachelor?"

"Simply because they *are* so won," replied De Clare.

"Your argument cuts its own throat," answered Mortimer; "it is a sort of logical *felo de se*."

"I do not see it," said De Clare.

"No more than you do whither your premise would lead you," rejoined Mortimer.

"Oh, yes," answered De Clare; "I perceive where *that* leads me,—to the great mortification of your little vanity.—But who is this dame, that has stirred up such dire strife betwixt me and my friend?" continued De Clare, tauntingly.

"My daughter Helen," said Lacy, "who but left me as you came."

"Helen," exclaimed De Clare, "a name of bright renown,—I proclaim myself her Trojan Paris at once, and thou," turning to Mortimer, "her chafed Menelaus."

"I accept the distribution," said Mortimer, willing to escape from the aspick tongue of De Clare, "but will the lady play her part?"

"You have a daughter, then?" observed Walwyn, addressing Lacy, desirous of stopping the waspish encounter between De Clare and Mortimer.

"Yes—one of four," replied Lacy. "Her two sisters have taken husbands, and the eldest of them has already given me a title to call myself grandfather. I have a son, too, who might have done the same office for me first, and he had taken me for his model."

"Stays he with you?" inquired De Clare.

"No,—he is on his travels,—and was in Italy, when last I had letters from him."

"On his travels, to come home disguised," replied De Clare, "with a pick-tooth in his mouth, and Venetian morals, stolen from a gondola, in his heart. It is the plague spot of the time, I know; but a son of mine should sit cross-legged, and walk slip-shod, ere he should taint the air I breathe with French oaths and Italian vices."

"And yet," said Vehan, "what better fits a man to play his part in the world, than a just knowledge of the world, which, as I take it, cannot be gathered from fire-side pilgrimages, or book-travelling, only."

"And what knowledge, worth the gathering, I pray you," replied De Clare, "can your boy-traveller bring back, who sees a wonder in every thing that is new, and who pampers a child's curiosity, merely because he cannot feed a manly judgment, having no skill wherewith to prepare the meal?"

Vehan, who was too indolently contemplative to engage in such a controversy as he knew must grow out of any argument with De Clare, made no reply.

Walwyn availed himself of the pause that followed, to remind Peverell, significantly, that the "sun had gone down," two hours ago.

"Yes," replied Peverell, "and it is *three* hours, and more, since I received this from Fitz-Maurice."

"What is it?" said Lacy.

"A letter," answered Peverell; "but as enigmatical and as brief, almost, as the scroll of Fortescue."

"Read it!" exclaimed De Clare.

Peverell did so; it was couched as follows:—

"Eleven shall choose nine; nine shall become twelve, ere ten go: he that hath faith shall have it: I come not; but there shall be MANY the better when there is ONE.

"Fitz-Maurice."

A silence of several minutes ensued. As was the case

with Fortescue's mysterious packet, this letter of Fitz-Maurice passed from hand to hand; it was read, and re-read; its several sentences separately meditated upon; and then, the whole together. At length Vehan spoke.

"I think," said he, "I can just pass the threshold of this mystery: I can advance one step, but all beyond, is dark and incomprehensible to me."

"Enter at once, then," replied De Clare, "and when you have opened the door, perhaps some of us may be able to go a little farther."

"*Eleven shall choose nine!*" continued Vehan, looking at the letter. "Yes—and eleven have chosen nine—we have chosen nine as the hour for going to the Abbey. There I stop."

"And there, as I guess," said Lacy, "we shall all stop. For my part, I profess to have no skill in making out a conjuror's riddle. I have been all my life used to plain orders in plain English—take that battery—cut off the retreat of yonder squadron—fight to the last,—and so on. These are the things I best understand."

"So say I," exclaimed Overbury. "Show me my work, and leave me to do it; but for your hopper-gallop witchcraft, and foggy bedevilments, it is like striking at an enemy in the dark—your blade falls every where but upon his carcass."

"I should be vastly pleased," said Mortimer, "if any one can tell me why this moody gentleman, Signor Fitz-Maurice, talks and writes in the clouds thus. I swear I can make nothing out of his letter, but that he means to keep away from us to-night; *I come not!* that is plain enough."

"Yes," observed Peverell, thoughtfully, "*that is clear enough.*"

"It is all as it should be," interposed Owen Rees;—"all as it should be, mark you. Fitz-Maurice is not as one of us, do you note; he can work by charms, and spells, and conjurations. Did he not tell us so, I pray you? And, moreover, he hath killed magicians, and seen necromancers, and kept company with—I mind not his name just now—but that matters not—I mean that good old gentleman, who taught him magics by the side of purling streams at midnight, while they were counting the stars; and, farther, he speaks of things to come, like

a wizard. And is a man who can do all these things, to talk like one of the million, as if he could only eat, drink, and sleep—drink, sleep and eat? No, I warrant you—it is out of all reasonable calculations to say so.”

“You are right,” said De Clare: “a lion does not mew like a cat—nor your noble dog bark like a mongrel. Every thing in nature proclaims its particular quality, by organs special to itself. The sun shines not like the moon, nor the moon as the stars—the thunder speaks not with the soft voice of the west wind—nor does the rough winter court us like the spring—then why, as thou sayest truly, should a demi-god profane his tongue with the words of a costermonger? But to the business;—I see nothing in this letter that concerns us to fathom now. We have it here, that we shall not have Fitz-Maurice to-night. What he meant should be understood is unambiguous; what he meant otherwise, he hath skill enough—or I have grossly misconstrued him—to conceal. Let us then to the Abbey, for the hour wears fast upon nine, and watch for our signs when the chimes go.”

To this suggestion of De Clare's, an immediate assent was given, and, in a few minutes, they were once more at the doors, which Peverell opened, and they entered.



CHAPTER XII.

THE preparations made by the mayor for their reception were the same as those of the preceding night, and the first thing that emphatically recalled to their recollection the events of that night, when they had seated themselves, was the vacant chair of poor Wilkins. It had not been removed, and no one now occupied it. It was in the same place, too; and this simple circumstance caused a mournful silence to prevail for some minutes.

“I read your thoughts,” said Walwyn, at length;—“but we must not yield to such reflections.”

“Poor fellow!” ejaculated Clayton, who sat next to

the now empty chair, "it is impossible not to remember the good-natured being who last night amused us with his merry tale, and who now lies festering in his shroud. Heigho! It is very natural to have such thoughts."

"Ay, it is natural," said De Clare. "But what is the whole teaching of life, from the cradle to the grave, but one continued lesson, how to wrench these natural yearnings of the heart from their hold upon it? We are creatures of the present only! The past is a mighty ocean, whose waves close upon our track, and efface all vestige of it; while the future lies before us, a shoreless sea of shadows, which we pass through from hour to hour, each hour converting them into that present which is eternal, and still there is hereafter, stretching its vast obscure beyond."

"Prithee, now," exclaimed Mortimer, "do not give us a homily, when a cup of wine would be so much more suitable to our condition. Let us use the present you talk of, like a welcome friend, turn our backs upon the past, and as to the future, let the world slide, say I."

Mortimer was like a moth, playing round a taper. He could not keep from going so near to the flame of De Clare's caustic humour, as to singe his wings now and then: and this last sally would probably have cost him a terrible scorching, (for De Clare curled his lip and knitted his brow, as he was wont to do, when preparing to shoot forth one of his most envenomed invectives,) but at that moment the clock struck nine.

"Hark!" exclaimed Lacy—"the chimes are going."

They were all silent, and listened in breathless suspense, to the sonorous peal. Every eye was strained in different directions, expecting, each instant, to behold the promised signs. The chimes ceased. No sound was heard; no visible token followed. Still they spoke not: and so profound was the silence, that they could hear the heavy swing of the iron pendulum, as it vibrated to and fro. They sat thus for nearly ten minutes, and then Wilfrid Overbury spoke.

"The fiend has juggled with us," said he, "and we are his fools. Signs! The best sign we shall see to-night, is this, I trow;" and he filled out a brimming cup of wine.

"I begin to think," observed De Clare, "that what-

ever meaning may be veiled beneath the words of Fortescue's scroll,

“ ‘When the chimes go nine,
Then look for the sign.’ ”

we have not discovered, it: the chimes *have* gone, but we are unvisited by the sign.”

“Perchance,” remarked Vehan, “Walwyn was right, and the sign, if any, manifested itself on the outside of the Abbey.”

“Tut!” exclaimed De Clare; “are we to conclude that we are thus played with—that, being here—I care not, whether within the walls or without the walls—a mere device—a tricksey quibble, is to send us back again, the sport of inventive malice?”

“By my soul, I believe it not,” said Peverell, warmly. “I am as little the slave of fancy or of fear, I guess, as any man around this board; but if you were all to declare, with one voice, here is deceit, singly, I would say no! And singly I would refrain to verify, or otherwise, my strong persuasion.”

“You speak like a man of observation, and a man of sense, mark you,” replied Owen Rees, addressing Peverell. “We have seen, and heard, and witnessed, and been told, too much already, not to know that we have magicians, and enchanters, and conjurers, to deal with; and when, I pray you, have such black squires been plain, and intelligible, and sun-like in their doings? Will you tell me that?”

“Sun-like, or hell-like,” vociferated Overbury, “’tis plain we are juggled. If my throat is to be cut, what am I the better, whether the knife is drawn across it at noon or midnight?”

“I should think, Mister Overbury,” said Rees, with an air as cool as that which plays about his native mountains, “I should think, Mister Overbury, that you know the difference.”

“How!” exclaimed Overbury.

“Oh, nothing—nothing at all, mark you,” replied Owen, not caring to make a quarrel of it just then; “but the hangman is often cheated, you know, of his due.”

Overbury scowled at Owen Rees, while the latter merely nodded at him, as if he would say, “You may understand me, and I hope you do.”

"One thing is beyond denial," observed Walwyn, "that the chimes *have* gone nine, and that we have seen *no sign*. Now, the question is, shall we watch longer?"

"Ay," replied Peverell. "Be not too hastily convinced: remember the letter I bear about me—remember how the hours are there mingled, but all included, from *nine to twelve*—wait the last.

"Well, then, be it so," said De Clare; "here we abide till the twelfth hour; but let us devise some mode of forgetting how the minutes go. A doleful ballad, or a mirthful tale, or any thing that may steal away our thoughts, would do. My lungs are not clear to-night, or I would sing you, in excellent tune and just measure, the choice ditty of 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid.'"

"I like the notion well," replied Hoskyns, who had taken the same seat as on the preceding night; "and, by virtue of mine authority, I call upon you, first of all, to pledge me round in a cup of wine, and then Vehan shall sing or say."

"I am obedient to your first command," said Vehan; "but for your second, I have no skill, either in voice or words."

"We do not covet your skill," answered De Clare; "but your words or your voice, or, rather, both—for your voice without words, would be as bad as a knavish echo; and your words without voice, no better than a sexton's epitaph."

"Nay, an' thou wilt take no denial," said Vehan, "have with you, if my memory betray me not. When I was at the University, being prone to solitude and study, I sometimes blotted paper with my thoughts, when other students of my age, in their hours of leisure, betook them to hawking, fishing, or the sports of the field. About that time, there occurred a tragical event in a near county, which I, having the poetical vein upon me, did throw into metre, and this (for naught else can I do) I will repeat, if, as I have already said, my memory betray me not."

"A sorrowful lament!" exclaimed De Clare, "well suited to the occasion and the time. Pronounce—and let it be with discreet emphasis. Mar not thine own progeny, like an unnatural parent. Come, begin."

"It will not hold you long," replied Vehan, "and, what is better, you will do me a kind service the sooner you cry, enough!"

"Begin, begin," said De Clare, "or your prologue will tire us, ere the play commence."

Vehan, after a moment's pause, delivered, with much energy, and with a full, melodious voice, what follows:

ALICE GRAY.

I.

In cloud and tempest clos'd the day,
In stormy wrath it pass'd away;
Bequeathing, in its sullen flight,
New horrors to the coming night.
The night came on, the wind was loud,
The heavens were wrapt in funeral shroud,
So dark, her swarthy diadem
Was brighten'd by no starry gem:
No ray the pale, cold moon shed forth
To light the traveller on his path,
Or guide him where his lov'd abode,
The pole-star of his wishes, stood.

II.

In such a night, so dread, so drear,
What heart so stout that owns not fear?
In such a night, sublimely grand,
Who sees not the Almighty hand?
Pale superstition kneels and prays,
Amid the sheeted lightning's blaze;
While bed-ridden age, in silent dread,
And weeping youth, with shrouded head,
Wrapt in unearthly terrors lie,
In horror's nameless ecstasy!

III.

Save man, what living thing then bore,
The blinding flash—the deafening roar?
The wind storm howling in its course,
The mountain torrent's thundering force—
Ocean, upheaving from its bed,
Its silver foam, now fiery red;

Tinged by the momentary glare
 Of lightnings in the lurid air :
 The deluge, rushing down amain
 As it would flood the world again—
 And overwhelm creation in its wave,
 Nature's eterne and boundless grave !

IV.

Nor yet to man it ere was given,
 When thunders shake the cope of heav'n,
 When billows roar, and mountain's rock,
 And earth, unbalanc'd, feels the shock,
 Her frame in wild commotion hurl'd,
 The shadow of a closing world,
 To mark, unmov'd, the mighty fray,
 Nor pause to think—nor bend to pray !
 Yes ! tho' his spirit walk abroad,
 And proudly own th' omnific word,
 His chastened terror still reveals,
 The pious ecstasy he feels,
 And while, in phrensy so sublime
 His soul outstrips the bounds of time,
 He lists the elemental war,
 With mingled throb of joy and awe !

V.

Such was the night, when Alice Gray,
 Her beads all told at shut of day,
 Her wicket clos'd, her window barr'd,
 Her poverty her safest guard,
 Heard, as she press'd her humble bed,
 A noise might wake the sleeping dead.
 Rude shouts assail her startled ear,
 Distant at first, but now more near.
 And then, her name is roar'd aloud,
 As if pronounced by numerous crowd ;
 So her bewildered mind conceives—
 And fancy willingly believes }
 The tale that frantic terror weaves.
 She does not dream, for she has tried
 Each weary hour, from side to side,
 (Tossing in restlessness of pain)
 One moment sweet, of sleep to gain ;
 But sleep, affrighted, fled her eyes,
 Scar'd by the tempest of the skies.

VI.

Hark ! that clamorous yell without !
 They knock—they call—she cannot doubt !
 “ Who knocks so loud this dreadful night ?
 What boisterous cries mine ears affright ?
 What tramp of steeds beside my door ?
 Away !—disturb my rest no more ! ”
 In cadence hoarse, a voice replies,
 “ A light ! a light ! arise ! arise !
 In travail pangs a lady lies,
 And thou must speed with us to aid,
 And show the mystery of thy trade.”
 “ No lady’s travail pangs I heed—
 No guerdon in my utmost need
 Should tempt me forth ; the storm is loud,
 And on my taper hangs a shroud
 Foreboding death, or direful spell—
 Horseman ! away ! ” “ Thou hag of hell !
 Thou palsied crone,—thou wrinkled patch !
 Unbar thy door, uplift thy latch,
 Or, such a thundering stroke shall fall,
 On wicket, lattice, and on wall,
 That breach full wide shall soon be split,
 Horsemen and horses to admit ! ”

VII.

The thunder roll’d—the lightning flash’d—
 The winds were loud—the voices hush’d—
 Awhile Dame Alice thoughtful lay,
 Afraid to move—afraid to pray ;
 While, to bewildered fancy’s view,
 Her twinkling light burn’d dim and blue,
 And from without, on blasted oak,
 She heard a boding raven croak.
 Portentous omen, dire and dread !
 The colour from her pale cheek fled !
 Chatter’d her teeth—her body shook,
 As one by shivering palsy strook !
 Her pulse beat high—her heart was low,
 Unbidden tears began to flow,
 And beads of sweat, in piteous chase
 Roll’d swiftly down her aged face.
 Her wither’d hand across her breast,
 Herself from evil sprite she bless’d,
 Making that holy, Christian sign,
 Emblem of blessedness divine,

Devoutly deem'd a potent spell
O'er goblin, witch, and imp of hell.

VIII.

A second summons from without,
A fierce, a loud, and lengthen'd shout,
A furious din, a sudden shock,
That walls, and room, and windows rock,
A deafening crash—a volleyed roar,
Proclaim the deed—proclaim it o'er!
Another moment pass'd, and then
Alice beholds four armed men,
Her bed beside. Awhile they stood,
Banding their wit in jesting mood;
With sneering scoff, they mourn'd her plight,
And own'd, "it was a wretched night
To take a lady from her rest;
They pardon crav'd: a high behest
Compell'd them, and they could not choose.
Ungentle acts like these to use
Beseem'd not with their calling high,
For they were knights of chivalry!
They pray'd she would not judge them wrong
From any license of their tongue,
Gentle and gallant youths they'd prove,
No foes to blandishment and love."
Thus, in alternate mock and jeer,
Reckless, or joying in her fear,
Each tried with brutal raillery,
To aggravate her misery.
But Alice heeded not their suit—
Her eye was fix'd, her tongue was mute;
She look'd, and yet she naught observed,
She listened, and yet nothing heard;
For fled was that directing power,
Which culls from every varying hour,
The fleeting essence of our thought—
So strong the terror of the moment wrought.

IX.

And now another mode they try
To rouse her from her lethargy.
They rudely hail her by her name;
Their errand briefly they proclaim.
They bid her "rise, and clothe her straight,
And haste with them, ere yet too late,

Where child-bed lady loudly moans,
 And bitterly for sin atones."
 Alice with wonder wildly mute
 Reck'd not their loud and clam'rous suit;
 Silent she lay with hands uplift,
 Like one awaiting solemn shrift;
 Ready to bid the world farewell,
 When ghostly priest had rung her knell!
 So blank, so pale, so wo-begone,
 Looks felon who has murder done,
 And hears in every passing gale,
 A dreadful voice proclaim his tale;
 And so looks he—unhallow'd wretch,
 Whose ruffian hand has dar'd to touch
 The orphan's store—the widow's mite,
 When sleepless, or in sleep's despite,
 The victims of his treachery stand—
 A mournful and accusing band
 Around his bed, and rouse his soul,
 To pangs beyond the mind's control.

X.

But one, the leader of the crew,
 Had aspect fierce, and wild to view;
 With threatening brow, and shaggy beard,
 An eye that never danger fear'd;
 On whose swart features, rude and dark,
 Each passion fell had set its mark;
 While every gesture, tone and look,
 A bleak and savage mind bespoke.
 GORRUC his name: ask you his life?
 'Twas a sad and wretched strife
 With want and wo, with blood and guilt—
 (Much blood for villains' hire he'd spilt)
 With gloomy and repentant mood,
 As each, by turns his heart subdued;
 For now, in frantic vice he's proud,
 In madness bold, in fury loud;
 And now, in anguish, melts to tears,
 The wretched victim of his fears!
 Ah! who that ever felt the bliss,
 The more than mortal blessedness,
 Of virtuous deed, of virtuous thought,
 From heavenly contemplation caught,
 The peace of soul, serene and calm,
 For every wo, a precious balm,

The proud contentment of the mind,
 In peril, and in pang resign'd,
 The dauntless mien, the fearless breast,
 Of innocence the sign and test,
 Would madly change the fervent glow,
 For aught that guilt can e'er bestow ?
 For stealthy pace, that fears the wind—
 Looking in terror still behind ;
 For throbbing pulse, and aching heart,
 Remorse's pang, and sin's keen dart ;
 For eye, that scowls with sullen air,
 For mind distraught with fell despair,
 For feelings harrow'd up with dread—
 For death—the wretch is never dead !

“ You wrote in a prophetic mood,” here interrupted De Clare, (looking at Overbury, whose darkening countenance, and restless manner, showed that he was much moved.) “ Had you *then*, ever seen a catiff, whose ‘ aspect fierce,’ ‘ shaggy beard,’ ‘ swart features,’ and ‘ bleak and savage mind,’ bespoke one who ‘ much blood for villain’s hire had spilt?’ ”

“ I warrant not,” said Rees, (who, like the rest, had almost instinctively fixed his eyes upon Overbury, while Vehan was giving the character of Gorbuc,) “ I warrant not—’tis the poet’s art, mark you, to invest the passions of our nature, whether good or bad, with such general resemblances, that wherever they are found to exist, they are at once known by their similitudes. You and I,” he continued, addressing De Clare, “ nor, indeed, any round this board that I wot of, feel not *our* stomachs uneasy, because Alice Gray, in her dismal terror, looked like the

“ ‘ Unhallow’d wretch
 Whose ruffian hand had dared to touch
 The orphan’s store, the widow’s mite,—

when

“ ‘ The victims of his treachery stand,
 A mournful and accusing band,
 Around his bed, and rouse his soul
 To pangs beyond the mind’s control ! ’ ”

“ You have a trim memory, I think,” said Overbury, sullenly.

"Yes," replied, Owen, "I can recollect when I will—and more than a cup of brisk wine washes away."

"You should not sleep upon your recollections, then," rejoined Overbury, fiercely, comprehending the Welchman's allusion; "for in the morning you forget again."

"I shall not sleep upon it," said Rees, quietly. "But enough; Master Vehan is impatient to proceed, and we stay him with this babble."

"I am ready, but not impatient," replied Vehan, "for it irks me; yet I am assuredly ready, if it irk not you also."

"We will flatter you anon," said De Clare, "and swear how delighted we have been, when you have done. Proceed, therefore."

Vehan continued:—

XI.

Gorbuc, this spotted man of blood,
Beside Dame Alice's pallet stood.
He, whom nor fear, nor pity touch'd,
With giant grasp her shoulder clutch'd
Shook the scar'd beldam from her trance,
And (while she eyed his form askance)
Roar'd fiercely in her startled ear
"Array thee in thy wonted gear,
And mount upon my nimble steed.
Thou'd best obey—I thee areed!
For peerless lady of this land
Needs aid from thy experienced hand."

XII.

Alice, sage matron, skill'd in all
That can to travail pangs befall,
Who knew each herb, its wondrous power
To sooth the anguish of that hour:
And could with prudent lore foretell,
If all that happ'd, would happen well,
Whose practis'd hand might well assist
Nature's own efforts, when she list,
Was sought with eager prayer by all,
From humble cot, to banner'd hall.
For she, beside, had power to trace.
In new born infant's thoughtless face,

What weal or wo might it await
 In this world's mix'd and jarring state.
 The eye, the nose, the lip, the chin,
 Sure tokens all, of grace or sin,
 Portending honour, wealth and fame,
 Or sorrow, penury and shame!
 She, in each feature, too, could find
 The mother's look—the father's mind,
 Just as the crone with wily thought,
 Forejudg'd her omens would be bought.
 Nor did she lack that highest worth,
 In those who tend on human birth,
 To sooth the hour of anxious pain,
 With ribald jest, and wanton strain;
 To cheat the sufferer of a throe,
 Or deck with smiles the face of wo,
 By telling some lascivious joke,
 By prurient madam loosely spoke—
 Or some ambiguous word or deed
 By simple maiden done or said,
 Which learned wives would turn, the while,
 To purpose naught, and meaning vile.
 Rare arts! which prudent nurse or leech,
 Must learn, must practise, and must teach!

XIII.

Alice, who heard the stern behest
 Which ruthless Gorbuc had addressed,
 Now play'd a well-dissembled part,—
 (No age robs woman of that art!)—
 Feign'd look of joy, and cheerful smile
 The gloomy ruffian to beguile.
 And, truth to say, her panic now
 Was much diminished, I trow;
 For one among the lawless four
 She knew to be the young Fitz-More,
 Son of old More, 'yclept the tall,
 And serving man in neighbouring hall.
 At sight of him she grew more bold:
 "And well," quoth she, "I'm poor and old,
 But what of good I can perform
 God's will I'll do, in spite of storm,
 Or pitch-dark night, or pelting rain,
 Or worse, my old rheumatic pain.
 As Heaven shall judge, I knew ye not—
 Or I had come at first, God wot!

But in this lonesome, drear abode,
Full two good miles from any road,
How could I tell but robber train,
Might strive an entrance here to gain?
And yet, alas! an' if they came,
They'd find me old, and poor, and lame,
Nothing to tempt them!—though in truth,
In wrinkled age or blooming youth,
Our helpless sex is never safe,
From man, whom lust and lechery chafe."

XIV.

Impatient gesture Gorbuc show'd,
With mirth the other faces glow'd,
To hear the mumbling, wither'd dame,
Talk of her fears from amorous flame.
But she who saw in Gorbuc's eye,
A wrathful glare that might defy
A heav'n-fraught pencil to express
In all its fearful sullenness,
With terror from her bed up-sprung,
Though still, she could not stop her tongue.
No wonder that. What art can teach
To woman modesty of speech?
What wight, so lucky, ever caught
A woman silent when she ought?
Alice, with wafture of her hand,
Now sought to tell the gazing band
How female decency forbade
Before their eyes herself to clad:
She will'd them turn their backs awhile;
At which e'en Gorbuc deign'd to smile;
But still, obedient, wheel'd him round,
And, with his comrades pac'd the ground.
The ancient prude then left her bed,
Drew on her hose, and coiff'd her head,
And whilst her other parts she dress'd,
Her various feelings thus express'd;

XV.

"Rare doings these! ah, well-a-day!
Thus some must work, and some can play.
It was not always thus, I wot,
When Alice liv'd in green-wood cot,
And husband had—a yeoman stout,
Whose arm would try a lusty bout

With any mate that dar'd to show
 Slight to his wife—good wife, I trow!
 But he beneath the sod is laid,
 Or it had ne'er for shame been said
 That Alice Gray was rous'd from bed
 By those who fore'd her humble shed.
 Ah! gentle Wat! thou'rt in thy grave,
 And little dream'st that any brave
 Hath quail'd thy widow'd spouse's heart—
 'Twould almost make thy spectre start
 Forth from the earth. And sure, in night
 Like this, thy angry spirit might
 Wake from its slumbers in the tomb:
 I almost think it in the room!
 But Heaven forefend! Alice is bold,
 Though poor, and lame, and very old,
 She has a conscience pure and clear——"
 A look from Gorbuc rous'd her fear—
 Of spotless breast he could not brook to hear.

XVI.

By this, the dame had donn'd her clothes,
 And from the bed-side up she rose,
 Seeking her cloak of stout gray cloth,
 To shield her from the tempest's wrath,
 And eke her hat, and polish'd cane,
 That might her feeble steps sustain.
 But now a fearful rite began,
 And Alice's heart-blood coldly ran,
 As Gorbuc o'er her visage drew
 A sable veil, that hid from view
 Whither she went, or how convey'd:
 Yet she, subdued, no struggle made—
 Nor spoke—nor mov'd—but darkling stood,
 Pondering her fate in anxious mood.
 A silent tear, a silent prayer,
 The anguish of her mind declare;
 And as the horsemen led her forth,
 She deem'd her doom the doom of death.
 With sinewy arm around her waist,
 Gorbuc upon his courser plac'd
 The hood-wink'd dame, bidding her grasp
 His giant trunk, and hold him fast,
 Lest, as the steed like lightning sped,
 She found some stream or ditch her bed,

XVII.

The meteor, streaming through the sky—
The sightless winds, that howling fly—
The living light that darts on earth—
Quick as the mind to thought gives birth—
The arrow, hissing in its course—
The deathful ball's resistless force,—
Might all seem emblems of that speed
To which stern Gorbuc urg'd his steed ;
While, close behind, the horsemen ride,
Spurring each courser's galled side,
Through vale, through flood, o'er hill, o'er plain,
They rush—they plunge—they dash—they strain,
Awed by no peril that may threat,
As if above, or chance, or fate,
For still the angry storm was loud,
And still careering lightnings plough'd,
The dun and starless brow of heaven—
As Chaos once again had striven
Creation's bland and beauteous frame,
To make a wreck without a name ;
And still the rattling thunders peal'd
Along the empyrean field,
While mingling torrents intervene,
To close the horror of the scene !
Ah, me ! poor Alice, silent now,
To every saint put up a vow,
Breathing her mental prayers as fast
As if each moment were her last :
And clung to Gorbuc's ample vest,
Obedient to his sage behest.
To disobey, had been, perforce,
Th' unskilful rider to unhorse ;
For ne'er before had she display'd—
As wife, as widow, or as maid—
Her bold dexterity and grace,
In riding such a furious race,
Most gladly, too, would she dispense
With her unwish'd-for eminence,
But that she deemed her guide the devil,
And held it wisdom to be civil !

XVIII.

At length—

Vehan was here interrupted by a long-drawn snore, which resounded throughout the Abbey like the last bray of an ass, just before he begins to shut his mouth and drop his ears. It was from the dilapidated nose of Overbury, and hence, probably, (issuing from two such nasal fragments as his nostrils were,) its remarkable quality. He was in a sound sleep; but what surprised Vehan infinitely more was, that, upon looking round, he discovered they were all in the same situation. He had not observed them before; for, while endeavouring to recall the words of the poem, he had kept his eyes either half-closed, or directed towards the opposite wall, in order that his attention might not be distracted.

It would have been impossible to select a man better adapted than Vehan for receiving a slight like this. His indolent nature was too glad of a release, upon any terms, from the labour he had undertaken, to quarrel with the one now offered. He had none of the vanity of an author to be wounded, nor any of that sensitive self-esteem, which kindles into offence at the shadow only of a disrespect. He was a being so entirely wrapped in his own contemplations, and deriving so very a nothing from the rest of his fellow-creatures, that, had he been bidden to a feast, and, on his arrival, found his inviter abroad, at a neighbour's banquet, he would have turned quietly upon his heel, gone musing home again, and dined off a broiled capon from his own kitchen, without once reflecting why he ate alone that day.

When, therefore, he now looked round upon his slumbering friends, reposing themselves in all the various attitudes of a brief, sitting-up sleep, some with their heads resting on their hands, some thrown back in their chairs, some dropped forwards upon the table, and Overbury, exactly opposite, spread out like an over-fed boar, which had tumbled on its back into a ditch, while, ever and anon, the walls echoed with his snoring, he merely folded his arms, and followed his imagination to his own world of thickly peopled fancies. Insensibly, however, his dreamy thoughts grew more and more indistinct, till at last they entirely vanished, and he himself sank into sleep, just as he was entering, in idea, a visionary myrtle grove, and listening to the soft melancholy strain of the night-ingle.

CHAPTER XIII.

PEVERELL was the first who awoke. He felt, (or fancied he felt,) a cold, icy hand clasped in his; and heard, (or fancied he heard,) a low, gentle voice, breathing in his ear the words of Fitz-Maurice's letter; "nine shall become twelve ere ten go;" and then, exclaiming in a louder tone, "Depart!"

He started from his slumber. At that moment the Abbey bell went twelve, which roused them all.

"Rare doings these—ah, well-a-day,
Thus some must work and some can play,"

exclaimed De Clare—"go on, go on—what does she say next?"

"Rare doings!" said Mortimer; "I think they are rare doings, indeed! By my veracity, thou hast been asleep. Why, Alice had got out of bed and dressed herself.

"By this, the dame had donn'd her clothes."

Proceed—an excellent ballad, by my faith; I am desperate in my curiosity to know what followed."

"By your leave," observed Owen Rees, "*you* have been asleep, mark you. The poor old creature had set out on horseback behind Gorbuc, holding him fast,

"Lest, as the steed, like lightning sped,
She found some stream or ditch her bed."

"Ha! ha!" roared Overbury, "I am the only true man among you. May I never walk the deck of my pinnace again, or smell salt water, if I did not count ye all, like so many carrion sheep dead of the rot, while Vehan was thus going on,—'The meteor—the living light—quick as the mind—like old chaos—making a wreck without a name—' And there he left off, just now, as the clock struck ten, and I was waiting to hear the name of the ship that was wrecked."

"See," observed mine host, in a half whisper to Ve-

han, "how a man may be mistaken! It is not a minute since, that I filled this cup with Canary, and drank it off, while you were telling of

"Some lascivious joke,
By prurient madam, loosely spoke."

and I have been cudgelling my brains to think what the joke was."

"This is excellent!" observed De Clare. "What say you, Vehan?"

"That you have *all* been asleep," he replied. "But at what particular moment each closed his eyes, I know not; for it was not till the nose of the worthy gentleman opposite, sent forth a sound which might have been heard at Dunstable, that I was aware I had so desired an audience. He did me a kind office, I assure you, for I was weary, and I thank him for it. You know my humour," he continued. "I forthwith resigned myself to meditation, and did not mean, at any rate, to disturb you till I heard the eleventh hour strike."

"This is a strange affair," said Walwyn, "it seems we have all been asleep, and yet, for mine own part, I can most truly affirm I recollect neither going to sleep nor waking."

"As little do I," observed Hoskyns; "and were it not that the fact must be so, from what appears, I should be ready to swear that *I* have never once closed *my* eyes, no, nor my ears, for—and pray indulge me thus far—I ask Vehan, upon the faith of a gentleman, to declare whether he had got farther than the ghost of Alice Gray's husband coming into the room and addressing Gorbuc?"

"I certainly had not," said Vehan, smiling,—

"There," interrupted Hoskyns; "now tell me again, an' you have the face to do so, that I am such a moon-calf as not to know when I have been asleep."

"I certainly had not," repeated Vehan, "gone farther than the ghost you speak of; and as certainly, not so far, for there was no ghost; but most certainly much farther than the description of Alice's half expectation that the spectre of her husband *might* 'wake from its slumbers in the tomb.'"

The countenance of Hoskyns fell, as he listened to this sentence of conviction from the lips of Vehan, and he exclaimed, "Well! after this, I'll believe a man may go to

bed, and get up the next morning with a headach, for want of lying down all night."

Peverell had been silent and thoughtful during the whole of this conversation. He, like the rest, could have declared his own unconsciousness of sleep; but, unlike the rest, as it appeared, he had been awakened by some mysterious agency. The icy hand, and breathing voice, were realities to his mind, which he doubted, as little, as that the body of Wilkins had been changed from the position in which they left it, but which he was also as little able to explain. Like that occurrence, however, he determined that the present one should remain for a season at least, a secret within his own bosom.

"That we have not been watchers to-night," said he, "admits of no dispute; but I cannot allow you to escape," he continued, addressing Vehan. "You, forsooth, did not mean to disturb us till the eleventh hour—you, who were buried in your own waking thoughts. It so chances, however, that the last hour which struck was twelve."

"Twelve!" exclaimed Lacy.

"Ay, even so," replied Peverell: "for I, who had been no more a watcher than yourselves, awoke but a minute before the clock went, and counted the hours."

"This is more strange still," observed De Clare. "To have slept at all, when we consider the cause of our coming hither, may well surprise us; but to have slept so long, and slept unconsciously, betoken other influences, almost, than those of nature merely."

"There is one," said Overbury, pointing to Clayton, "who has outslept us all, by half an hour. You had better rouse him," he continued, addressing himself to Mortimer, who sat by his side, "and let us see whether he, too, when he opens his eyes, will swear they have not been shut."

Clayton was leaning back in his chair, with his hands dropped upon his lap, and looked like a man who had fallen into a sweet sleep, after much fatigue; a sleep which you would have sworn must refresh his wearied spirit. Mortimer gently shook him.

"Oh, leave him alone," said Peverell; "he'll wake anon; and I am sure if he had his choice, it would be to sleep till we are prepared to go."

"And are we not prepared?" asked Walwyn.

"In truth," observed De Clare, "this is a most lame conclusion, to a beginning of far different promise. We were to have signs. Where are they? We more than hoped that the riddle of Fitz-Maurice's letter would here be expounded, in part, or in whole. It is not! What have we done? Betook ourselves to this place like geese, and gone to sleep like the hedgehog. Then comes twelve, and, like midnight roysterers, we steal home to our beds, to be laughed at immoderately to-morrow, by all the simple townsmen of the place. However, e'en let us depart. The shortest follies a man commits are ever the best; and each minute we now stay will only make ours the longer."

"How different from last night!" exclaimed Lacy.

"Yes; last night," replied De Clare, "was a trial for men, but this has been a bauble for children. Wake that sleeping man, and let us hence."

"And do you not," said Peverell, "read in last night's page, something that should make you willing to turn over another leaf?"

"We have done so," answered De Clare, "and what have we found? Nothing! except, indeed, the choice ballad of Vehan," he continued, laughing, "which we had not the courtesy to hear to its conclusion."

"What," replied Peverell, "was your own sentiment but now? *To have slept so long, and slept unconsciously, betoken other influences, almost, than those of nature merely.* Have you forgotten?"

"No, I have not forgotten," said De Clare; "but wherefore have these things been? To make us, as it would seem, the fools of our senses last night, and of our too credulous fancies, this."

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed Overbury, "said I not so, three hours since? Said I not we were juggled, when the chimes went nine? Said I not, this, holding up a cup of wine as I now do, and drinking it off, as I mean to do, was the best sign we should see to-night? Ah!" he continued, smacking his lips, "fill me with such liquor as this, and a fig for the devil! for the devil a fig care I."

The words of Overbury were repeated, but in the following form, by a voice which seemed to proceed from one sitting at the table:—

"Give me liquor like this—
Give me liquor like this—

And a fig for the devil,
A fig for the devil,
For the devil a fig care I."

"Why, how now?" said Overbury. "You have made a song of me. Bravo! sing it again, if you please, Master Hoskyns."

"I sung not," said Hoskyns; "it was yourself, or mine host here."

"I protest!" exclaimed John Wintour, "I never opened my lips: besides, I have no note in my voice."

"I sing!" roared forth Overbury. "When the winds blow from the four quarters at once, and the waves lash themselves into bellowing, call that a lullaby, an' you catch a song out of my throat. But it was delicately sung, and I could cry to hear it again."

AGAIN the words were repeated! Overbury stared. He looked at every one, to see if he could discover the minstrel.

"Some one here," quoth he, when it ceased, "hath gotten a mouth in his belly. I heard such a monster once, when I was a captive in Algiers—he would talk with himself—that is, his other self—out o' the window, and sometimes down in the cellar, or in the garden; there were two voices, and one man; he was our captain, our task master, and would threaten us with the bastinado in his natural voice, and laugh, while he had it, with that in his belly. But I never heard the like since till now."

"Be still," said De Clare.

"Ay, marry," replied Overbury; "but I see how it is: yonder is double throat, as we used to call Selim," he continued, pointing to Clayton, "who mocks sleep to mock us. Do whisper in his ear, and bid him try it once more."

"I pray you be still," repeated De Clare; and then, addressing himself to Peverell, "methinks," said he, "here is another leaf turned over."

"Yes," interposed Lacy; "but this is a jovial, merry devil, at any rate."

"By my faith," observed Mortimer, "I was never more amazed, than when I heard the rough speech of our companion, given back in such a joyous and thrilling descant."

"It can hardly be the delusion of our ears," said Pe-

verell. "Besides, we heard it twice. Or, can it be the echo within these walls?"

"Echo!" exclaimed De Clare. "If this be an echo, I'll strain my lungs to a plain question in English, and look to be answered in Hebrew. No, no, it is no echo. But, that it may be a trick, I am ready to grant; for I have myself known men gifted with the strange faculty of speaking with a second voice, issuing certainly from their insides, and yet seeming to proceed, most fantastically, from wheresoever they list it should come. Whether any of us be so provided, it lies not in my power to say, beyond this, that I certainly am not."

A similar declaration would doubtless have been made by all the rest, but their attention was now drawn towards Clayton, whom Mortimer was endeavouring to wake. He shook him lustily, spoke to him, and almost pulled him from his seat; but every effort to rouse him appeared fruitless: he still slept on.

"Awake, man!" said Peverell, taking hold of his hand, and shaking it with violence enough almost to have separated the arm from the body; "awake! we are about to depart!"

It was in vain. Yet he seemed but as one sleeping. His cheeks and lips kept their natural colour, and his hands were warm.

"He has fallen into a fit, I think," said Walwyn.

Renewed endeavours were made to restore him. His vest was thrown open; his apparel loosened, wherever it appeared to press too tightly upon the circulation of the blood; his temples chafed with such stimulants as were at hand, and his head kept erect. But he remained in the same apparently lifeless condition.

"If it were not for his looks," observed De Clare, "I should conclude he was apoplexed, or had been seized with epilepsy;—but it can be neither, for his features are as calm and as undisturbed, as though he were in a profound sleep."

"Hold this to his lips," said Mortimer, drawing from his pocket a small mirror, set in ivory: "it will show if he breathe or not."

De Clare took the toy from the hands of Mortimer with a contemptuous smile at so manifest a display of foppery.

He held it for some minutes to the mouth of Clayton; but not a breath sullied its clear brightness.

"I have never seen, but I have heard of persons," said Walwyn, "in a trance;—surely this is one."

"If so," observed Vehan, "and it hath all the outward appearance of it, he should be forthwith removed to a warm bed, and there watched night and day, for the first glimmer of returning sense."

Peverell was exceedingly afflicted at the condition of his friend. He still held his hand, which seemed to grow cold within his, feeling almost like that icy one with whose freezing pressure he had awakened. Yet he believed not he was dead. That thought never once crossed his mind. He considered it a fit of some kind, and tried to recollect, but in vain, whether he had ever heard Clayton, or his wife, mention his having been subject to such a malady.

"It is cruel to linger here another moment," said De Clare, "when, for aught we know, this man's life depends upon instant aid."

"But how shall we be able to remove him," observed Mortimer, "at an hour like this?"

"How?" exclaimed De Clare, indignantly; "are we not ten? And which among us is too delicate to assist in an office of so much humanity?"

"Are we not TEN?" repeated Peverell—"ay, TEN! Can this be it?"

De Clare started. He fixed his eyes upon Peverell. "By Heaven!" said he, "I could almost persuade myself it is so. *Nine shall become twelve, ere ten go. Nine has become twelve, and here are ten about to go!*"

"I hardly blame you," observed Walwyn, "that you thus enslave your better judgment to an idle fancy: but, in the name of that Heaven to which you have appealed, I call upon you to reflect for a moment. Here is a man——"

"Peace!" interrupted De Clare; "we shall find another time to confer upon this; and, to show you I stood not in need of your rebuke, I stop your speech, simply because I am of firm belief that this man lives, and that we are playing with his life most barbarously."

Peverell now suggested that it would be better he should

precede them, and prepare Clayton's wife for a scene which could not but be a severe trial of her feelings.

This was assented to by all, and Peverell left the Abbey. When he went out, he found only a few persons assembled, as compared with those of the preceding night. It was scarcely known, indeed, that any watch was to be kept: and, as there were no appearances outside, the few who had collected began to disperse shortly after twelve. When, however, they saw Peverell come forth alone, they were somewhat puzzled. They judged, from his hasty manner, that something had occurred, though they knew not what. But their suspense was soon at an end; for scarcely ten minutes elapsed before they beheld the rest emerging slowly from the Abbey, and bearing Clayton in a chair.

Peverell found Dame Clayton up, and looking as wives are apt to do, when they are kept out of their beds beyond midnight, by the neglectful absence of their husbands. She, probably, thought it *was* her husband, and (not having the fear of the cucking-stool before her eyes) was prepared with a greeting, which had been ready for him a good hour or twain. But when she perceived Peverell only, her countenance suddenly changed, from that of a scolding wife to a quarrelsome woman.

"You are well encountered!" quoth she; "and save me a trouble which I had laid up for the morning; when I intended to ask you, an' you are not ashamed of yourself, thus to lead an honest man astray?"

"Stay your tongue, good housewife," said Peverell; "this is no time for brawling."

"No, marry," interrupted the dame; "it is no time for any thing that I wot of, save being in bed and asleep. But where is the simpleton, after his second fool's frolic?"

"He has fallen suddenly ill," replied Peverell.

"Ill!" exclaimed she. "Now, ill befall thee, for thy part in his malady, whate'er it be. How, ill? The colic, I dare be sworn! pinched with a griping colic, from that cold, dank place. I'll go warm a yard of new flannel, and toss up a comfortable posset for his bowels, that he may take i' bed; or I shall have no wink o' sleep to-night, with his grumblings."

"Stay," said Peverell, as Dame Clayton was hurrying away, "Has my friend Hugh ever been subject to fits?"

"Fits!" replied the dame, "not he! He was once brought home dead from the corporation dinner; but he got better of that, and never had a fit in his life."

"How, dead?" inquired Peverell.

"I mean—why, I don't mean he was stark, he was alive afterwards—only he could not speak—no, nor move;—no, nor didn't speak nor move, nor hardly breathed, for, I believe, the better part of a day and night, as I remember, now you mention it:—but what of this?"

"Why, I do fear," said Peverell, greatly relieved by this communication, "that he has been seized, to-night, with another of these swoonings."

"Now, the Lord comfort me!" she exclaimed, "what have you been doing with him?"

Peverell was about to reply, when he saw those whom he had left in the Abbey approaching.

"Here he is," said he, "and be not distressed, for he will soon recover, I doubt not."

At this moment they arrived. They had contrived to convey Clayton in the chair in which he sat, without altering his position, so that he still looked as if he were only sleeping. His wife, indeed, deemed it no more at first, and began to mutter something about being "in a fit of too much drink;" but when she perceived how calm and motionless he was, and, that to all appearance he breathed not, she changed to sobbing and lamentation.

"Your tears," said De Clare, "will not do this man half so much good as the instant aid of the doctor. Dry them up, therefore, and go fetch one."

Mistress Clayton looked at De Clare, as though she felt a strong inclination to dispute this peremptory interference with her prerogative of crying; but she held her tongue.

"A skilful leech lives hard by," said mine host, "and I'll rouse him. Master Simcox hath had good practice in his time, and breathes a vein while another man is thinking on't."

He set off, and in less than ten minutes returned with Peter Simcox, who no sooner beheld Clayton, than he gathered up his mouth, looked unutterably dismayed, and shook his head with becoming gravity. He felt Clayton's pulse, and cried, "Humph!"—Lifted up his eye-lids to examine the eyes, and said, "Ah! ah!"—Put his hand

upon his heart, and exclaimed, "Oh, oh!" Then looking at those who were standing round, he shook his head again with a most determined foreboding of the worst.

"Well, sir, said Peverell, "what is your opinion?"

"That he is grievously sick," replied Peter Simcox.

"We could have sent you word to that effect," observed De Clare, "and not troubled you to leave your bed, to come here and tell us only that."

"Moreover," continued Peter Simcox, "his life is in peril—in marvellous great jeopardy."

"Oh, my poor dear husband!" exclaimed Mistress Clayton, "my sweet Hugh, open your eyes and speak to me. Oh! oh! oh!"—Then turning to the doctor, "Am I a wife, or widow, gentle sir?" she continued.

"As I should judge," replied Peter Simcox, "you stand between the two conditions; even as your good man here, is poised, as I might say, 'twixt heaven and earth, like the suspended coffin of the Prophet."

"Wo worth the time," ejaculated the dame, "that ever he deemed it of profit to suspend his honest calling, and go fiend hunting to yonder Abbey!"

"What should be done with him?" inquired Peverell.

"That appertaineth to me to perform, rather than to expound," replied Peter Simcox. "And that I may perform, I crave of you all, forthwith, to avoid the chamber. He requireth much quietness, and free air—*ergo*, we should be alone. Leave him to me and his disconsolate spouse; and my utmost art shall not be wanting to vanquish the enemy that now layeth so close siege to his life."

This intimation was sufficient. They retired immediately, and directed their steps towards Lacy's house. Peverell was somewhat comforted by the declaration of Mistress Clayton, that his friend, who had once before been in the like danger, recovered; and he mentioned this as they walked along.

When they arrived at Lacy's, their discourse naturally turned upon the occurrences of the last two hours, and it was easy to perceive a growing distaste in nearly all of them, except Peverell and Overbury, (the latter acting from a merely brutal ferocity of character,) to the farther prosecution of this business. The feeling that seemed to predominate, was not so much one of fear, as

of vexation; an irritable consciousness that they were accomplishing nothing by their submission to mysterious influence, or their observance of apparently supernatural commands. Their curiosity had been inflamed—their excited spirits brought into action—their proceedings reduced almost to a specific form and character, but to what end? No one thing had occurred that held out a definite or intelligible motive for going on. When, therefore, Peverell vaguely adverted to what was yet to come, and spoke of their next night's watching, De Clare expressed himself vehemently against repeating their visit to the Abbey.

"I, for one," said he, "declare freely, that here I renounce the enterprise; or, at least, (so to qualify my abjuration,) till I have some fresh and better incentive thereto, than any that now prevails in me."

"I am much of your thinking," observed Walwyn. "It hath rarely chanced, in my life, that I have ever taken the first step in any thing, where I could not see, or believed I could, the last. Here, however, I may be said to have taken many steps, and not only the last is hidden from me, but I have no certain knowledge whether my very next step should be to the right or to the left. It is like walking blindfold among pit-falls; which he who does, for he cannot choose, is to be pitied; but he who shuts his eyes, with folly aforethought, and commits himself to so perilous an adventure, is a fool, to be pitied only for that he is one."

"Nay," quoth Mortimer, addressing Walwyn, "if you be purblind in this business, what am I to do, who profess myself a natural blinkard in such things, if not whole blind?"

"Why," replied De Clare, (who, were he in the last agony, must have shot his bolt at Mortimer, though he had gasped out life in the doing of it,) "I'll tell you what you are to do; fulfil the Scriptures in the only way thou canst, by seeing a straw in another man's eye, though you cannot see the block in your own."

"You practise what you teach," retorted Mortimer, coldly; "and would do so, I'll be sworn, were your precept the affirmative of the sixth commandment."

This was one of the few dexterous replications which the gall of De Clare sometimes stung out of Mortimer.

De Clare felt it; but, before he could throw back the recoil of his own bitterness, Lacy spoke.

"I am a soldier," said he, "and the discipline of the wars has ever taught me to go through with an enterprise. I like not the showing of the back, except when an enemy does it. Stand still, or go on; but go on, when you have once moved. Yet, soldier as I am, and thus disciplined as I proclaim myself, I must stipulate for one thing—a foeman, a reason why I should advance, though it be but a dismantled battery which stares me i' the face, and would only mock my capture of it. But, confound me, if I can see any thing in this undertaking, beyond the mayor's wines and viands—wonders to stare at *when* we are awake, and sleep to deny *after* we are awake."

"That is just it," observed De Clare. "We are playing with shadows, trying to gather moonbeams, or catch the lightning's flash; a fit occupation for a day-dreamer like Vehan, but too volatile and unsubstantial for men who count the hours they live by what they do."

"And yet do nothing that is worth the counting," added Vehan. "Day-dreams are oft-times better than day-deeds; and it were well for some men, if they only dreamed of that which they are fated to perform."

"Well," said Hungerford Hoskyns, "I am he that will either go on or stand still, though no soldier; but having, as you see, the two elements of a right good one. I have been frightened, I confess it: and I have been forced to grant that I slept with my eyes open, and my senses awake; but, determine in this matter, as may please yourselves, and it shall please me. Go again, and I go with you; stay away, and I'll creep to my bed in reasonable hours, as I have been wont; or take daylight for your inquest, and I'll be up with the sun."

"In other words," rejoined De Clare, laughing, "you are like the hungry fool i' the interlude—always ready to fall to, whatever is set before you."

"Yes," answered Hoskyns, gaily, "as the bell clinketh, so the fool thinketh:—you may make the application."

Peverell had hitherto remained silent. He now addressed them.

"I am greatly mistaken," said he, "or you will soon see cause to alter your present resolves. How, or when,

or where, that cause is to show itself, I pretend not to know; but that it will show itself, is a conviction on my mind, scarcely, if at all, less strong than that of my now standing here. I read not this thing by parts, but in the whole; and, in the whole, I perceive consequences that must be unravelled. I am content, however, to follow the general voice. Let it be, that we here pause. We shall not be many hours nearer to our graves, before the advent of some circumstance or other shall determine us again to proceed."

"It is that circumstance, whate'er it be," replied De Clare, "which I lack; and, for my single self, I re-affirm, that I will not be made an idle show of, for men to gaze and point the finger at; as one who placed the cap and bells upon his own head, and carried his bauble with a proud heart, for grinning mockery to make sport with."

"Well, then," said Walwyn, "it is agreed, not that we forswear for aye, but that we suspend, for awhile, all farther proceeding in this business; in short, that we do nothing, till we discern more clearly than we now can what it is we have to do."

"Exactly so," replied De Clare; to which Peverell signifying his assent, they all departed.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE moment Lacy was alone, his daughter entered the room. She advanced towards her father with an expression of chastened satisfaction in her countenance, not as if she rejoiced that he was safe, but as if she were thankful that he had been permitted to live another night. Her heart had received a reprieve only, not a full pardon. She kissed him tenderly as she exclaimed, "Thank Heaven, you are still preserved to me!"

"I thought you had retired to rest ere this," said Lacy.

"No," replied Helen; "I watched for your return, and now I have come to bid you good night."

"Good night, then," replied her father; and he pressed her hand affectionately.

"And no more!" said Helen, with a sigh, as she arose to retire again.

"It is late," continued Lacy, "and sleep is stealing over me."

"I should be sleepy too," answered Helen, "at this drowsy hour; but I know not what drug or opiate could make me so."

She leaned forward, and pressed her lips upon the forehead of her father. He felt a tear fall upon his cheek. He looked up; her eyes swam in the full flood of filial sorrow.

"Whence, whence, is this grief, my beloved child?" exclaimed Lacy, with a faltering voice, as he drew her to his bosom.

"Can you give me comfort?—can you give me hope?" she said, sobbing aloud.

"Yes, both,—if you will receive them."

"If!" responded Helen, and she sighed heavily—"if I will receive them!—'*Give me food, or I die!*' cries the wretch whose very entrails famine gnaws like a vulture. Would you say to such a one, '*yes, if you will eat!*'—Why, his frantic prayer is for food, as my sad one is for comfort. Tell me, I implore you, then, what hath happened to-night, and I shall know what there is of comfort for me;—tell me, what is hereafter intended, and, if hope lurk there, my poor heart will leap to meet it?"

Lacy could not resist this appeal. He made Helen again sit by him, and related to her all that had occurred in the Abbey, as well as the resolution which had been taken. She listened with profound attention, but the agitation of her feelings was manifest.

"So," she exclaimed, when Lacy had concluded, "there is another!"

"Did I not say," observed her father, "that Clayton had fallen into a fit merely, and that, once before, he had the like visitation?"

Helen smiled incredulously, almost scornfully, at this description of Clayton's situation.

"And now," continued he, "have I not given you both present comfort and future hope?"

"Neither!" said she. "That wretched man, whom I

know not, but pity, will never look upon this world again. And oh! would I were as sure he is the last, as I am that the cause which shall re-assemble you is at hand!"

"And if it be"—replied Lacy.

"And if it be," interrupted Helen, "the blood that shall flow, still runs warm in the living veins that must empty themselves, to glut the fell demon whose work all this is."

"Tush, girl!" exclaimed Lacy; "you are getting fond. Your young imagination, heated by tales of goblins, and fairies, and the whole brood of the devil's imps, plays tricks with your reason, and makes you fantastical. I am not the man to deny the thing that is, or to wrestle with the plain evidence of my senses; and, I grant you, there is something about this business which I do not comprehend so quickly as I should the movements of an army;—but, plague on't, I will not go to my nurse for the explanation."

Helen sighed. The argument (if so it might be called) between her and her father, had now taken that turn which put an end to it. She knew how utterly ineffectual every attempt would be to work upon him, by a belief which was rooted in his own mind. When she had, sometimes, endeavoured to do so, he, at first, derided, but at last became almost angered with her earnest discourse—the more earnest, because she felt assured, if she could once shake his scepticism, she could then arm him, in some degree, against the danger he was braving with a defenceless hand. Her only remaining hope, therefore, was, that she might be able to reach his heart through those natural channels, which are rarely closed to the pleading of a child, even in the sternest bosoms; and, never, where, as was Lacy's case, (who loved Helen with the whole affection of a father,) every feeling towards her was bound up in the desire to make her happy.

It happened, unfortunately, however, for poor Helen, that, in this affair of the Abbey, the veteran Lacy looked at it with a soldier's eye—that is, he could not altogether strip his participation in it of the soldier's honour.—Others might renounce the enterprise, and call it their humour, their inclination, or their dislike; but, for him, there was no such license; so, at least, he construed his self-imposed duty, shrinking, with feverish jealousy, from

the most remote possibility of fear being imputed as the motive. Let all the rest relinquish it, and, as has been seen, he was ready to join them; but, to relinquish it singly—to leave all the rest—nay, to have deserted only one among them, while one remained firm, was a step which he could almost as easily have taken, as to have fled from his standard in the field. Hence it was, that, for the first time in her life, the anxious, sorrowful, and supplicating Helen had begged a boon—begged it, too, with many a bitter tear, and heart-sore sigh—only to have her importunities denied. Her father, indeed, never failed to soften denial by a frank confession of his reasons: but, it is a cold consolation, when we would prevent sorrow, to know only why we cannot.

Helen did not persist in her entreaties after what she considered as the almost harsh reply of her father: but, at that instant, her mind conceived a project, from the mere contemplation of which, she derived comfort. It was suited to the intensity of her apprehensions for her father's safety, and to her strong persuasion of the nature of the peril which menaced him. It was no less suited to what had been the predominant character of her studies, and the wild fancies they had nurtured. She had often longed, when brooding over the mystic wonders of fairy or necromantic legends, to have the demonstration, the ocular evidence of charms and spells, which had the reputed power of unfolding the future, and arresting the course of human events. More than once, indeed, in the midnight solitude of her chamber, she had trembled on the verge of proof, as she performed the imperfect rites which were familiar to her mind: and tokens of their limited potency had been manifested, in sounds and preternatural motions, which at once appalled and satisfied her curiosity. But these had hitherto been tried in the mere wantonness of inquisitive doubts; the desire, so natural to the human mind, of putting to the test its own credulity; the vagrant wish—no more—of just playing with the truth—if it were truth—and satisfied to know, from a little, that all was possible. She had now, however, a higher and a stronger motive to go farther; and her silent determination to do so was an infinite relief to her present feelings. She contented herself, therefore, with once more pressing her lips to those of her revered

father, bade him "good night," as if she had been suddenly convinced of the childishness of her fears, and taking her taper, hurried out of the room to meditate upon her new-born hopes. Lacy was overjoyed to observe the change; and, retiring to his own chamber, soon found that repose he needed.

Peverell, on his way home, called again at Clayton's, where he found Peter Simcox still in attendance, and from whom he learned that his friend continued in the same condition. There had, as yet, been no signs of returning animation; "but," said the doctor, "I am not without hope; for, though there be no change for the better, there is none for the worse: he still looks like one asleep only; his cheeks retain their freshness, his lips their colour, his limbs their pliancy; and the natural warmth hath not forsaken his body. Now, these are all probable, though not sure prognostics of recovery."

When Peverell reached his own house, his man Francis met him with a strangely mysterious look and manner.

"Here is one within," said he, "that will not, by any dint of persuasion, go; though I have been two good hours trying my skill to that end."

"Who is it?" inquired Peverell.

"That, neither, can I not discover," quoth Francis. "She knocked at the door—it might be something after eleven, perhaps near upon twelve—and when I opened it, she whips into the hall without saying a word, walks into every room in the house—I following her, as a beadle follows a rogue, till he sees him beyond the parish bounds—and, at last, takes possession of your low chair, and, without so much as 'by your leave,' begins to wring her hands, and cry, 'Lord! Lord!'—'What do you want, good woman?' said I. But I might as well have addressed myself to the walls, for, 'Lord! Lord!' was all her moan.

Peverell hastened into the room, and there he saw poor Madge—her face buried in her hands, rocking to and fro, weeping most piteously, and, as Francis had described, ever and anon calling upon the Lord, but in a tone of such utter wretchedness, that it pierced his very heart.

He spoke to her. She started up at the sound of his voice, looked at him, and then mournfully exclaimed, while she pointed to the ground—"They have buried her!"

"Then be comforted," said Peverell, in a kind and soothing voice; "Your hardest trial is past."

"What a churl he was!" continued Madge, not heeding the words of Peverell: "I only asked him to keep the grave open till to-morrow, and he denied me! Only till to-morrow,—for then, said I, the cold earth can cover us both. But he denied me! So I fell upon my knees, beside my Marian's grave, and prayed that he might never lose a child, to know that blessedness of sorrow which lies in the thought of soon sleeping with those we have loved and lost! It was very wrong in me, I know, to wish to call down such affliction on him—but he denied me,—and I had to hear the rattling dust fall upon her coffin—ay, and to see that dark, deep grave filled up; as if a mother might not have her own child!"

"Poor afflicted creature!" exclaimed Peverell, in a half whisper to himself.

"Yes!" said Madge, drying her tears with her hands.

"Yes! I have walked with grief, for my companion in this world, through many a sad and weary hour. But I shook hands with her, and we parted, at the grave of Marian. I buried all my troubles there. What is the hour?"

"Hard upon two," replied Peverell.

"Then I must be busy," answered Madge, in a wild, hurried manner, and smiling at Peverell, with a look of much importance, as if what she had to do were some profound secret. "You'll not betray me, if I tell you?" she continued, taking his hand—"Feel!"—and she placed it on her heart. "One, two; one, two; one, two—and so it goes on; it cannot beat beyond two! Oh, God! what pain it is before it breaks!"

She now returned to the chair from which she had risen, at the sound of Peverell's voice. He approached nearer; and (with a view rather to draw her gently from her own thoughts, than from any desire that she should leave his house,) he asked her "if she would go home?"

"Yes," she replied; "bear with me yet a little while, and I'll go. It is near the time I promised Marian, when last I kissed her wintry cheek, as she lay shrouded in her coffin; and I may not fail. Lord! Lord! what a troubled and a worthless world this seems to me now! A week ago, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and

the green earth, and all that was upon it, were dear to mine eyes; and I should have wept to look my last at them! But now, I behold nothing it contains, save my Marian's grave! You will see *me* laid in it, for pity's sake—won't you?"

"Ay," said Peverell, "but that will be when I am gray, and thinking of my own: so, cheer up. He that shall toll the bell for thee, now sleeps in his cradle, I'll warrant?"

She beckoned Peverell to her, and taking his hand, she again placed it on her heart. A sad, melancholy smile, played for a moment across her pale wrinkled face, and her glazed eyes kindled into a fleeting expression of frightful gladness, as she feebly exclaimed, "Do you feel? One!—one!—one!—and hardly that.—I breathe only from here," she continued, pointing to her throat. "Feel! feel!—one!—one!—another!—how I gasp—see!—see!"

She ceased to speak; the hand which retained Peverell's relaxed its hold—her head dropped—one long-drawn sigh was heaved—and poor Madge resigned a being touched with sympathies and feelings not often found in natures of nobler quality, in the world's catalogue of nobility. If, among the thousand doors which death holds open for mortal man to pass through, ere he puts on immortality, there be one, the rarest of them all, for broken hearts, this hapless creature found it. A self-accusing spirit bowed her to the earth, with the sharpest of all griefs—a mother's anguish for an only child—lost to her, as gamblers lose fortunes—thrown away by her own hand.

Peverell was deeply affected by what he had witnessed. It was not merely that he was wholly unprepared for such a scene; but, he had, all along, felt a singular interest in the melancholy story of Madge, and he brushed away a few honest tears from his eyes, as he disengaged his hand from hers, which, though it was now lifeless, still held his where she had placed it, to feel her heart's dying throbs.

"I shall grow familiar with death," he exclaimed to himself, while he quitted the chamber, to give some necessary directions to his man Francis in consequence of what had occurred. "Kit Barnes—Wilkins—this miserable woman—and——" He paused, his tongue refused to pronounce the name of his friend, though it hung upon his

lips. "The game is a-foot, the chase is hot—what deer falls next?"

Full of these pensive thoughts, he retired to bed; but they haunted him, and he could not sleep. The night had become tempestuous. The wind roared and whistled round the house—the rain dashed in gusty torrents against the casement—the thunder rolled at a distance—and, at intervals, some vivid flashes of lightning illumined the room. He lay, tossing from side to side, in feverish restlessness, for nearly an hour; but at length, sunk into a disturbed slumber.

His waking meditations pursued him, but mingled with the fantastic stuff of which our dreams are composed. He thought he was in the Abbey—alone,—and in utter darkness. It was midnight—he heard the bell toll the hour—He had an obscure recollection that others had been there before him, and had all died; but it did not seem to him as if he had known them. He felt that he was there to die too. Suddenly, a single ray of light, like a sunbeam, streamed through one of the windows. It was of dazzling splendour. While gazing at this beautiful object, which diffused its bright effulgence over the whole interior of the Abbey, he heard a loud laugh behind him. He turned round, and discovered that he was standing on the crumbling edge of a new-made grave, and that thousands of loathsome worms were crawling round him, and upon him. In vain he strove to quit his place. He had not power to move. He looked into the grave. At the bottom lay an open coffin, in which was a half-consumed body.—He knew it was the corpse of Marian. While yet gazing at it, a shadowy form glided past him—descended into the grave, and laid itself by the side of Marian. It was Madge. He thought he had never beheld an expression so heavenly as that which dwelt upon her features, when she once more folded her arms round the mouldering neck of her idiot girl. Another shadow passed—he knew it too—it was Kit Barnes!—Another!—it was Wilkins!—then another!—it was Clayton, who smiled upon him. They all passed into this new-made grave, and then faded from his sight. Other shadows flitted along, but their faces were muffled in their shrouds, and he knew them not. Still the worms crawled over him, and covered his whole body, while he strove in vain

to shake them off. At length the ray of light disappeared—he was in total darkness—he felt the cold slime of the worms upon his face and hands; they were creeping into his mouth—his stomach heaved—his very heart was bursting almost—he was chilled with horror at the thought of dropping into the grave, upon whose edge he stood writhing and trembling,—and, in the agony of his feelings, he awoke!



CHAPTER XV.

It was day-light, when Peverell sprang from his bed, and wandered into the fields, less refreshed, after such a sleep as he had had, than when he went to rest. A night of storm and tempest had ushered in a fresh, sunny morning, which dressed the face of nature in loveliness and smiles. The lark carolled above his head, and its glad notes descended, like a rich stream of melody, from the clear blue ether in which it sported—the awakening song of other birds floated on the breeze; the low of cattle sounded from the green pastures; the trees and hedges reflected a thousand brilliant hues, as the sun-beams played upon the rain drops which quivered on their branches, and which contrasted beautifully with the various tints of the decaying foliage—shade softening into shade, with that mellow harmony of colour which proclaimed the mighty-workmanship of Nature.

The cool air was most grateful to the fevered brow, and parched lips, of Peverell. His eyes gazed languidly, but delightedly upon the bright landscape spread before him, and his body seemed to shake off the weariness that oppressed it, as he stepped along. He had gained the top of a slight eminence, from which he could see, at one view, the whole of the ancient town of St. Albans. Here and there columns of blue smoke, ascending from the roofs, and slowly wreathing themselves into broader but less distinct masses, till they were lost in the surrounding

atmosphere, denoted that the little round of human life was recommencing. To sleep—to wake—to labour—to sleep again—and then again to wake and labour—writes the brief history of millions! In the distance, stood the lofty gray towers of the venerable Abbey, half veiled from the sight by a dewy mist, sent up from the dank earth, while through its thin curling folds blazed the windows of the edifice, as the sun's rays fell upon them.

Peverell sunk into meditation, as he looked towards the Abbey. All that *had* occurred, all that he felt *must* yet occur, passed through his mind. It recalled, too, an imperfect and obscure recollection of his dream, and a slight shudder agitated him, while he remembered with what agony he had striven to shake off the lazy worms that crawled and hung about him. It was no wonder, he thought, that such a dream should shape itself to his sleeping fancy, when he considered what realities had engaged his waking moments.

He was still ruminating upon these things, and endeavouring to conjecture what might that day befall, to explain or increase the mysteries of the preceding ones, when his attention was excited by a small, black, shaggy-haired cur, which had couched itself before him, and now sat looking wistfully in his face, wagging its tail, as if asking to be noticed. Peverell had not observed it before; but he called it to him, and the animal bounded to his feet, where it couched, and waited for farther invitation to be familiar. Peverell spoke to it—patted its rough sides—played with its pendant ears, and was amused with its frolics, as it leaped about him, licked his hands, and, by a variety of sprightly antics, testified its joy at so friendly a reception.

“And where may you live?” said Peverell, looking round, expecting to see some cottage near—“or hast thou no home, nor any master, that thus, like the forlorn of man's race, you cast yourself for protection upon the first stranger you meet?”

The cur stood still—pricked up its ears, and looked (as two-legged curs often do) as if it really understood what it heard. It then scampered off twenty or thirty yards—ran back—was off again, returned, and seemed, by its manner, to invite Peverell to follow. Peverell watched its motions for two or three minutes, and at

length began to walk in a contrary direction. The cur snapped at his feet—bit the ground—jumped up against him, and at last seized hold of his cloak, and tried to drag him back. At one time he was about to spurn it, but the animal crouched down, looked so imploringly in his face, and whined so piteously, that he could not find in his heart to strike.

“Well!” exclaimed Peverell, good-humouredly, “every dog has his day—this shall be thine, thou peremptory knave!—There! go on, and I’ll be close at your tail; for, after all, it is indifferent to me which way I wander.”

He turned. The shaggy devil yelped with joy, and coursed along like a hare, but ever and anon looking back to see if he was followed. Peverell kept on, his eye fixed on his four-footed guide, while his thoughts dwelt upon far other matters. In this way he traversed several fields, crossed miry lanes, and even broke through two or three hedges; till, at last, stopping and looking round, he no longer perceived the little, black, shaggy-haired cur; but he heard him barking furiously on the other side of a fence. He proceeded onwards, ascended the bank, and was about to leap a ditch that stopped his farther progress, when he saw a man lying on his face in the grass.

He cleared the ditch in an instant, and advancing towards the man, hailed him. No answer was returned. He approached nearer, and then he perceived that he was lying in a pool of gore. He turned him on his back. His throat was hideously mangled; the blood still bubbled from the gash that was across it, and he observed that in his half-clenched hands there were tufts of grass and earth, as if he had either struggled desperately with his assassin, or had died grievously hard. Peverell stood, for a moment, gazing on the shocking object that lay before him. The eyes were staring—the features distorted, and smeared with blood—the wound gaping; but the sun shone brightly—all nature smiled around—while a bloated toad, unscared by the presence of Peverell, was dabbling in, and sucking up, the clotted lumps that lay congealed upon the ground.

Peverell examined the body more attentively. It seemed to be that of a man somewhat advanced in years—perhaps, about forty; of middle stature, but large-limbed, and muscular withal. His apparel, which was of russet, be-

spoke him of no wealthy or distinguished class. Yet he had a chain of gold round his neck, to which was suspended a cross, carved in solid crystal; and in his pocket was a purse, containing money. It was not to rifle him, therefore, concluded Peverell, that the foul deed had been perpetrated. He was lost in horror and amazement. He knew not what to do.

"Sagacious brute!" he exclaimed, turning round—but the cur was gone. He whistled—he called—it came not. "Strange!" he muttered to himself, as he stooped down to disengage the gold chain from the neck of the unfortunate man, and to possess himself of his purse, deeming it right thus to secure them, either as a means of identifying the slaughtered victim, or that they might be restored, hereafter, to whomsoever should appear as the lawful claimant of them.

While thus occupied, he was startled by the sound of approaching footsteps, and the rustling of silks. He looked round, and saw a female, who was advancing along the path, across which lay the bleeding corpse. She was young, richly dressed, and dignified in her carriage. As she drew near, he stepped forward to meet her, desirous, if it might be, of saving her feelings from the shock which so frightful a spectacle must produce. She passed him in silence—trod close to the murdered man—gazed upon the body for an instant, and then veiling her face, went on. Peverell watched her with silent astonishment, till an intervening grove of trees concealed her from his sight.

He now resolved to return, forthwith, to the town, communicate what had happened to the mayor, and leave in his hands the further inquiry into this dismal tragedy. He was about to quit the spot, when his eye caught the figure of a man, crossing the adjoining field. He knew him instantly. It was John Wintour, who was returning from a small farm which he rented hard by, and whither he had been thus early to give directions to his labourers. Peverell shouted lustily, and mine host stopped. Peverell waved his cap, and mine host straight turned his steps to where Peverell was standing. He hastened forwards, and soon arrived; but the instant he cast his eyes upon the body, he exclaimed, "'Tis Fortescue! he who yesterday brought you the mysterious scroll. I know him by

his dress, and that scar beneath the eye, disfigured as his features are now."

"Had he a purse like this?" said Peverell, holding up the one he had taken from his pocket.

"Ay, marry had he," quoth Wintour; "and out of it he paid me for all he ate and drank, save his last pot of ale."

"And a chain, like this, too?" continued Peverell.

"I marked not the chain," replied Wintour, "but the purse had a special attraction for my observation: I could depose to it upon my sworn oath. And there is his knotted staff, of tough oaken wood," continued mine host, "lying by his side, which I noted while he sat in my house, and thought it a right trusty weapon for the hand of a lonely foot traveller. But, alas! it seems to have stood him in little stead."

"Look at this purse again," said Peverell, anxiously: "look at it well; consider his dress attentively, his figure, his make, that scar, that staff; in short, any and every thing about him, which may help to confirm, or suffice to destroy, your declared belief, that he is Fortescue."

"I will do as you desire," said Wintour; "but if I know myself, I know him."

He picked up the staff, and examined it—surveyed his apparel—looked at the scar, which was just under the right eye, and somewhat remarkable in appearance—took the purse in his hand,—looked at that—and then deliberately pronounced the words, "I am right. But soft! I pray you," he continued; "it hath come into my head this instant. I remember, twice, on his turning out the coin from his purse, to pay his score, a small gold signet appeared among the money. Look, you, if such a thing be here."

Peverell emptied the contents of the purse into his hand. The signet Wintour spoke of, rolled out the last.

"I am satisfied," said Peverell. "I am fully satisfied—but—" He paused. He felt that Wintour was not the man to whom it would be either prudent, or of any advantage, to impart the thoughts which now crowded upon his mind. "Let us to the town," he continued. "However it hath chanced that this man hath perished, our clear course is to make it known to the mayor, and ve him to direct such farther inquiry as may be meet."

They left the spot, and proceeded towards the town. Peverell was surprised to find that he had strayed to a distance of nearly three miles. He scarcely spoke to Wintour, except to tell him of the death of Madge, and to express a hope that he should find Clayton recovered. Mine host's tongue went as nimbly as his feet, which took three steps for each one of Peverell's; but though he talked of every thing—the Abbey, and his own farm—Madge, and a fine brindled cow—Clayton, and a stack of two years old hay, which he expected to sell next market day—Fortescue, and a valuable boar pig that had strayed the night before—still he could not engage his companion in any profitable discourse; an “ay,” or a “no,” (not always spoken in the right places) was all he could obtain. More frequently, indeed, he got no answer; and then mine host would change his theme, and try whether the mischance of the boar pig had more attractions than the virtues of the brindled cow. But Peverell's mind was tossing about in a chaos of thought, a world of confused and mis-shapen conjectures, which sometimes grew into half realities, when they were extinguished by fresh doubt, or darkened by seemingly irreconcilable contradictions.

They arrived at the mayor's, and Wintour took his leave, to attend to the concerns of *The Rose*. Peverell had an interview with his worship, and confining himself to the bare fact of his having discovered the body of a murdered man, without alluding to any other circumstance, departed again. The mayor was earnest in his invitation to Peverell to stay and breakfast, wishing, of course, to learn something of the preceding night's adventures in the Abbey; but when he perceived Peverell would not be entreated, he bade him good morning, and assured him he would instantly take the necessary steps for having the traveller's corpse conveyed to the church or town-hall.

The next object of Peverell's anxiety was the situation of Clayton. He called at his house, and found, with much regret, that he still continued in the same state of insensibility. He had been placed in bed, and Peverell went into the chamber. He could hardly persuade himself he was not asleep, so calm and undisturbed was his countenance, so life-like his appearance, and so ruddy and

healthful the colour of his cheeks and lips. He approached him, and placed his hand upon his brow. It was cold and clammy. But it was not the marble coldness of death; only that chilly feeling which accompanies suspended animation, by whatever cause produced. He took hold of his hand, and retained it for some minutes; it grew warm in his: and once or twice, when he gently pressed it, he fancied that the pressure was as gently returned. He inquired of his wife what was the doctor's opinion. She replied, it was favourable; for, having opened a vein in the left arm, it bled freely, which he considered a good sign. Peverell expressed his sincere wish, that the sign might be good; and Mistress Clayton responded, Amen! with a fervency of manner that convinced Peverell her heart was in the word. He returned home, and found his orders had been punctually obeyed with respect to the body of poor Madge. It had been removed to her own humble dwelling, he, as in the case of Kit Barnes, having given directions that the decent funeral expenses should be at his own charge, with a special command that she should be laid in Marian's grave.

Peverell now sat down to breakfast (rather from the custom of the meal than from any appetite for it,) when his man Francis presented himself.

"Please you, sir," said he, "here is the black gentleman on horseback, that would speak with you."

Before Peverell could reply, Fitz-Maurice entered the chamber. Francis withdrew, looking at Fitz-Maurice with an expression of countenance which seemed to say, "if you are not Beelzebub, you are marvellously like him!"

The appearance of Fitz-Maurice was haggard and distressed; his eyes were inflamed, his cheek pallid, his manner full of weariness and languor. Peverell pressed him to refresh himself with what was before him, but he declined.

"I am well pleased to see you," said Peverell, after a pause.

"I judged so," replied Fitz-Maurice, "and therefore have I come."

"I had your letter yesterday," observed Peverell; "but——"

"But," interrupted Fitz-Maurice, "you had not its meaning. I did not intend you should."

"Then, why——"

He was again interrupted by Fitz-Maurice.

"Then why send it, you would ask? This is my answer. When you shall know why I first sought you—why I sat with you in the Abbey, one night—why I did not sit with you there last night—why I am here now—and why you are perplexed, almost to madness, then shall you also know wherefore I am inscrutable."

"And then," replied Peverell, "it may boot me, perchance, as little as it now does Kit Barnes and Wilkins, and my friend Clayton, to know aught about it."

"*Was* he your friend?" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, eagerly.

"Whom!" said Peverell.

"That Clayton you speak of," answered Fitz-Maurice.

"Ay," replied Peverell; "the friend of more years that are gone than remain."

"And what of *him*?" rejoined Fitz-Maurice; "tell me—tell me."

Peverell related the occurrences of the preceding night at the Abbey, bringing down his narrative, so far as it concerned Clayton, to the visit he had just paid at his house.

"What made him go the first night?" inquired Fitz-Maurice.

"My persuasions," answered Peverell.

"What the second?"

"The same cause, as I believe; or, rather, to be just with him," continued Peverell, "for that he was my friend, and would not leave me."

"The condition fails!" muttered Fitz-Maurice to himself, and pressed his hand upon his forehead.

Peverell then recounted all the other circumstances which had occurred—the packet of which Fortescue was the bearer—the resolution not to resume their watchings in the Abbey—the ground of that resolution, and the required motive to renounce it—together with all that related to the discovery of Fortescue's murdered remains. Fitz-Maurice listened impatiently to the recital; and when it was concluded, he looked at Peverell attentively.

"Are *you* one with the many?" said he.

"I am one of them," replied Peverell, "and find I lack power to move them as I would."

"What if they all fall off?" observed Fitz-Maurice.

"I would go on," answered Peverell, "if——"

"If you saw whither you went," added Fitz-Maurice.

"No!" said Peverell; "if I could but feel, though that feeling were created in me by mute words, that I should proceed."

"This is a rich ornament," remarked Fitz-Maurice, carelessly, taking up the gold chain and crystal cross of Fortescue, which lay upon the table.

"Yes," replied Peverell; "and if he who owned it, were slain by those whose object was plunder, I marvel that it or his purse should have escaped them."

"You would go on," continued Fitz-Maurice, musing, and repeating the expressions of Peverell, "if you could but feel, though that feeling were created in you by mute words, that you SHOULD PROCEED?" and he laid a peculiar emphasis upon *proceed*.

"Even so," replied Peverell.

"You are right!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, grasping his hand, while his countenance brightened into joy; "I leave you now; but you shall see me again this day."

"When?" inquired Peverell.

"You shall see me. I am no slave of time, or of events. When you see me, expect strange things!"

He arose, and forthwith departed. His dwarf, as usual, was waiting with his steed, which Fitz-Maurice mounted, and rode off.



CHAPTER XVI.

PEVERELL returned to his chamber. "I am, indeed, perplexed almost to madness!" he exclaimed, as he threw himself in a chair, (using the words of Fitz-Maurice,) "and see no end to my perplexity. I begin to languish for that repose of the spirit which may be found in even suffering the worst. It is to lie on the rack, thus to be

hurried from doubt to doubt, from fear to fear, and from hope to hope, each hour teeming with some fresh wonder to bewilder me. Would I were once satisfied!"

While uttering these words, he had taken up the chain of Fortescue, and was partly occupied in admiring its rich workmanship, as well as the extreme beauty, and transparent purity of the crystal, out of which the cross, that was pendant to it, had been formed. Passing his fingers over the surface, to feel the exquisite polish it had received, he thought he perceived, on the transverse piece, a slight ruggedness, as if it had been scratched. He examined it more closely, and could plainly distinguish some words engraven on it. He tried to read them, but could not, for though palpable to the touch, and visible to the eye, they were not legible. He drew nearer to the window, that he might have more light. Still, he was unable to decipher the inscription, which appeared to be imbedded in the pellucid substance. At length, he held the crystal up to the sun, when, to his utter amazement, he saw, in liquid crimson letters, and floating as it seemed, in the centre of the cross, the following words:—

**"Let no man falter but proceed;
All that has been, was all decreed;
All that must be, must all succeed:
Be firm of purpose—firm of deed."**

Peverell was confounded. He gasped for breath: a sudden faintness came over him: he doubted, yet almost dreaded, the evidence of his own senses. Could it be, that he had really read these words, or was it a figment—a coinage of his own distempered fancy? He examined the cross more curiously than he had hitherto done: tried if he could discover any part where it had been joined; and attempted again to decipher the characters externally; but they appeared to have no resemblance to those which formed the words he had read. He shook the crystal violently, and then held it up to the sun. The only effect was, that the crimson hue of the letters was a little deepened by the agitation. The words were small, but perfectly distinct, and so divided, that the first two lines appeared upon one section, and the second two, upon the other, of the transverse piece.

Peverell, who was now satisfied that it was no illusion, at once comprehended its design; as far, at least, as concerned himself, and the rest who had watched with him in the Abbey. But there was something frightful to his imagination, when he reflected how he had become possessed of this mysterious injunction. He had plucked it from the mangled neck of a murdered man. And who was that man? How murdered? By what hidden influence had his steps been so directed as to make him the discoverer of his melancholy fate? That black, shaggy-haired cur, too, how inexplicable was its appearance and actions!

All these thoughts, and a crowd of others, linked with them by obvious associations, whirled through his brains, as he sat, with the cross in his hand, and every now and then holding it up to the sun, to read, and re-read, the mystic words. While thus absorbed in meditation, he received a message from the mayor, which plunged him into still greater amazement. It was to inform him, that persons had been despatched to the place he had mentioned, but that there was no vestige of any corpse to be seen.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "They must have mistaken the spot; or I gave a blundering description of it."

He resolved to go himself, and he called upon mine host, in his way, to accompany him. They were attended by several of the officers belonging to the corporation.

"You know the place," said Peverell to Wintour, as they proceeded along, "where I hailed you this morning, and where, when you came, you saw the body of Fortescue?"

"Know it," replied Wintour, "do I know my own right hand? Why, every rood of ground between this and my farm, is as familiar to me as my bed. It is all idle nonsense about the body being gone; the truth on't is, they did not want to be troubled, and would rather have left it as a meal for the crows, than carry it to the town-hall."

They soon arrived at the spot. "Here we are," said mine host, scrambling up the bank, "and here he lies, I'll warrant, e'en as we left him."

"Then he has come back within these two hours," observed the beadle, with a chuckle: "for that is just the

point we reached, and where we looked for the body most diligently."

Wintour stared, but spoke not. Peverell cleared the hedge in an instant, and sprang into the field on the other side. He was silent, too. Not only there was no corpse to be seen, but the grass looked fresh and unbroken, even where the blood had gathered into a pool, and the marks were visible of a violent struggle. Peverell could almost have suspected that both himself and Wintour were wrong, had it not been for two circumstances: these were, the foot traces, on each side of the bank, where they had ascended and descended; and the small branch of a tree lying in the ditch, which mine host had broken off in letting himself down.

When Peverell was completely satisfied that the body of Fortescue had disappeared, he merely observed to those who had accompanied him, that he would wait upon the mayor himself, and assure his worship of the fact as they had already represented it. He and Wintour then returned leisurely to the town.

"Can you account for this?" asked mine host, as he got over a stile.

"No," replied Peverell, thoughtfully; "I cannot account for it; neither can I for the shape of yonder cloud, or why that tree spreads its branches so fantastically. I only know that these things are so?"

"What do you think?" continued Wintour.

"Think!" said Peverell, "what should I think, but that you and I have a story to tell, at which men may shrug their shoulders and shake their heads, while we must hold our tongues, though our hearts swell ne'er so big."

"That is most certain," quoth mine host, "and it is a scurvy trick that Master Fortescue has played us, *ergo*. By my faith—I think I have it!" he continued; "the thieves—nay, they were not thieves, for they took nothing but his life—but the murderers, have conveyed away the body and buried it for their own safety. And yet, that will not do, upon better consideration, for they could not have made the grass spring up where it was trodden down, nor very easily have washed out the blood. So I am at fault——"

"Spare your brains, good Master Wintour," said Pe-

verell; "they will not do the service you require; but be thou at Lacy's three hours hence, and thou may'st there hear something which will, perchance, help thee to a clearer understanding of this matter."

Wintour promised he would, and left Peverell at the door of the mayor's house.

It was absolutely necessary, now, for Peverell to enter into some explanations with the mayor, sufficient, at any rate, partly to account for the apparent absurdity of the statement he had made. He, therefore, gave his worship a general, but guarded, narrative of the circumstances connected with Fortescue, and concluded, by observing, that this last occurrence was only another link in that chain of mystery which hung about the Abbey.

"A chain of mystery, indeed," quoth his worship, "and so long a chain, that I can tell you it hath reached from here to London. I have had an emissary down here, from the ecclesiastical courts to make inquiries, and 'tis likely the council will take up the business. I have given my opinions upon it, and my advice too; so they cannot say they are in the dark."

"That is as it should be," replied Peverell; "but what do you expect will grow out of this inquiry, and your advice?"

"I may not be more particular in the matter," said his worship, with an air of infinite solemnity, "till I hear again from the Council. It were as much as mine office is worth, to babble indiscreetly. But you shall find, and so shall they all find, that I have not slept at my post, nor winked at those duties, which fall so heavily on public men, when the safety o' the commonwealth is grievously endangered."

Peverell repressed his strong inclination to smile at this sudden display of grave magisterial solicitude, which seemed to have been roused in his worship's bosom by the arrival of the emissary from the ecclesiastical courts, and the anticipated investigation before the Council. He did not know that the emissary was merely one of the inferior domestics of the Archbishop of Canterbury's household, who knew something of his worship in former days, and called to revive old recollections, as he was casually travelling through St. Albans, upon an errand no way connected with its Abbey; and that all the rest, about the

Council, was simply the fringe of his worship's own invention.

He took his leave, however, and repaired to Lacy's, to have some communication with him upon what had occurred. He was not at home; but Peverell was ushered into a room where he found his daughter, Helen. He had never seen her before, that he remembered, and yet, at the very first glance, her air and figure created a feeling of instant recollection. He was not long in doubt. A farther observation of her person and dress, satisfied him it was she, and no other, who had that morning crossed the field in which lay the body of Fortescue. But she evidently did not recollect him; and he was determined, therefore, to ascertain if he could possibly be deceived in his opinion. In the course of a desultory conversation, he suddenly mentioned, as a rumour which was ripe in the town, that the body of a murdered traveller had been found in some fields, between two and three miles on the road to Dunstable. Helen changed colour—betrayed considerable agitation, and without asking, as would have been natural under other circumstances, any questions respecting the murder, she abruptly changed the subject of discourse.

Peverell was convinced. But what could have caused her to be thus early abroad? And how could she have witnessed what she did, and betrayed so little emotion? These were silent interrogatories, which immediately presented themselves to Peverell's mind, and which he was unable to answer.

He did not prolong an interview which had now become mutually embarrassing; but naming the hour at which he would return to have some conversation with Lacy, took his leave.

Helen was greatly relieved by his departure. She wanted the solitude of her own thoughts, for there was matter in them to absorb her whole soul. A fearful step had been hazarded; and to retrace it, was so little possible, nay, so little desired by her, that she was only intent upon schooling her heart to encounter and sustain the trial.

She had never, till this moment, felt the loneliness of her condition. Since her mother's death, she had so entirely abandoned herself to the discharge of those duties,

which connected her with her father alone, that he had become her friend, companion, lover,—all; and she wished no second object in her affections or esteem. In every thing that concerned her, he had, till now, been the only being in the world to whom she unbosomed herself; now he was the only being in the world to whom she could not. It seemed to her, indeed, as if they had exchanged their relative situations; as if her father were the object of *her* solicitude, and that she had to watch over and protect *him*, instead of being, herself, the delicate flower that should securely blossom beneath his guardian shade. Often when these thoughts prevailed, she would feel all the sacred recollections of her departed mother kindle within her, and inspire her noble nature with the anxieties of the wife, the parent, and the daughter, blended in the singleness of her filial devotion.

Helen had never sought to fix a friend among those of her own sex, and of her own rank and condition. But in this unexpected crisis, she raised to her confidence, a faithful creature; who had been her foster sister; one who had been brought up in the family, and who, for the last three years, had been constantly about her person, as her own maid.

Bridget Hall, (or little Bridget, as Lacy used to call her, from her diminutive growth,) might have had manifold failings, though it was no where recorded she had any; but she was the mistress of two virtues in absolute perfection—unshaken fidelity, and boundless attachment, to Helen. If Helen could have required, or Bridget could have believed there was occasion, that she should throw herself from the house-top to benefit “her dear ladyship,” the belief and the leap would have been linked as closely together as the electric flash, and the bolt that follows it. Bridget had another remarkable quality likewise, which some might be tempted to call a third virtue, seeing she was a woman: or rather *the* virtue, by way of distinction. Her tongue was as short as her body: and without having read or heard of the ancient states of Greece, (which certainly she never had,) there was, on all occasions, a Spartan brevity in her speech, that made many of the more loquacious of her own sex, declare she must have been bewitched when a nursling. Be this as it might, however, her laconic replies and communications, were

often of so whimsical a character, that it was the delight of her fellow-servants to ask questions, or set her upon delivering a message. They were sure to have the reward they sought.

She presented herself in the kitchen, one day, her face streaming with blood.

"Why, how now, Bridget," exclaimed the cook, "what has happened?"

"Tumbled," quoth Bridget.

"What, out o' the window?"

"Down stairs," said Bridget.

"But you are wounded, where is it?—on the head?"

"Cut my eye," quoth Bridget.

More than this was not extracted from her; and less could not. On another occasion, when Helen's favourite little pony was stolen out of the paddock, the moment she heard of the loss, she hastened to her mistress's chamber. It was evident, from her manner, that something untoward had happened.

"What is the matter, Bridget," said Helen, "that you look so disconsolate?"

"They have got her!" exclaimed Bridget.

"Got her!" replied Helen; "whom do you mean?"

"Joan," quoth Bridget.

"What, the pony, gray Joan?" replied Helen.

"Yes."

"Who has got her?"

"The thief."

"But how, and when? and where is the thief?" inquired her mistress.

"I don't know—last night—nobody can tell," answered Bridget.

Lacy, himself, would sometimes contrive to procure the enjoyment of a good-humoured smile at the expense of little Bridget; and this he generally did, either by asking some complicated question, or making some inquiry, which could not be answered but by a series of sentences. If he met her by chance, early in the morning, he would say: "Well, Bridget; do you think your mistress is stirring yet? Go and see. What is it o' clock? Where is Roger? There—go."

"No—Yes—Eight—In the buttery—Directly," quoth Bridget, and disappeared.

At other times he would address her with great apparent seriousness. "Bridget, I am not well to-day—I have got a touch of the rheumatism in my left shoulder—I think I had better not go out—the air is sharp—did you ever have the colic? Your poor mother died of it, I believe."

Bridget listened with the utmost gravity, and when her turn came to speak, she would reply, with a courtesy between each answer, "I'm very sorry, sir—it used to be in your right shoulder—you had better not—yes it is—only once—no, of a quinsy."

This simple, honest, faithful creature, who was endowed with a naturally shrewd mind, and possessed considerable energy of character, was now admitted, from mingled motives of necessity and choice, to the confidence of Helen. She could scarcely, indeed, execute her design, without either so confiding in her, or exposing herself to conjectures which she disdained to incur; while, independently of these considerations, she shrunk from being entirely alone in the business.



CHAPTER XVII.

WHEN, on the over-night, Helen had quitted her father, after another fruitless effort to dissuade him from repeating his visit to the Abbey, she finally and firmly resolved to try the efficacy of those means for his safety, which, she doubted not, would be successful. Before she went to bed, she disclosed her intentions to Bridget, and explained to her how she could assist in their accomplishment. It was enough for Bridget that her mistress needed her services; beyond that need, she considered it no part of her duty to inquire.

Helen, mean while, felt that relief, which the mind always derives, when beset with difficulties, from the consciousness of having made its election of a remedy, however slender may really be the hope of its efficiency. In the more arduous trials of the heart, suspense is bad

enough; but what is there to compare to that comfortless sorrow of knowing, or believing, that we could, if we would, end the troubles that persecute us? Helen had groaned under this sorrow, till her resolution was taken; and, from that moment, she exchanged it for one infinitely more tolerable. Indeed, she almost scorned to call what she now felt a sorrow, for it consisted only of a self-imposed ordeal, for the sake of her father—for the sake of one whom she cherished with such unbounded love.

Helen was buried in these meditations, when she was aroused from them by the opening of the door, and the entrance of Fitz-Maurice, who was preceded by Bridget.

“He asked for your father,” said Bridget, and left the room.

“He is from home, I learn,” added Fitz-Maurice bowing, and continuing the abrupt communication of Bridget.

“Yes,”—stammered out Helen with inexpressible confusion. “He is from home.”

Fitz-Maurice made no reply, but stood gazing at Helen in silence. She could not lift her eyes from the ground. They had caught one glimpse of his figure and countenance as he entered, and she felt the crimson on her cheek: her heart palpitated: an indescribable emotion oppressed her. When he spoke, the sound of his voice seemed like a mysterious union of tones she had never heard, with those which were familiar. They were soft, yet deep; startling, yet gentle; scarcely of this world, yet beautiful and enthralling. They still vibrated on her ear, like one wild chord of a harp, struck by some hand, with witching harmony beyond the cunning of art. A sudden faintness and tremour were stealing over her—her sight filmed—she laboured to breathe. What could it mean?—Was it the shrinking timidity of her sex, or the high-wrought sensibility of her nature which made her thus, because in the presence of a stranger? No: for Pe-verell was no less a stranger, and she had none of these feelings then. It was surely some spell that bound her to her chair. She would have given half her existence to reach her own chamber, but had not power to rise.

Fitz-Maurice stood before her, and marked the conflict she endured. At length he spoke: and Helen was lost in delirium.

“Fair one!” He paused. “You tremble!”

He approached nearer. Helen's agitation increased.

"Oh, God!" he exclaimed, "let not this too be mockery!"

Helen heard his voice—but not his words. It penetrated her very soul. He drew nearer still. She could have wished the earth to yawn, and hide her. He took her hand. Her emotions were almost suffocating. A flood of tears burst forth, while the hand he held, seemed to be the channel of a glowing fire, that rushed fiercely through her veins. She raised her streaming eyes: they met those of Fitz-Maurice, which flashed with triumph. He leaned forward, and murmured her name.

"Helen Lacy!"

"Again, that voice!" she silently ejaculated—"that voice of incomprehensible power! which speaks not to my sense, but subdues it!"

Fitz-Maurice quitted her hand, and strode towards a window at the extreme end of the room. He pressed his forehead vehemently, muttering some unintelligible words in a half stifled groan.

Helen ventured to glance at him, while his back was towards her. She felt it was in vain to disguise from herself, that she was under some unknown influence. It was her consolation indeed, and the refuge of her struggling spirit, to think so; or she would have shamed to reflect upon what else had been her unbecoming weakness. In imagination, she still beheld the look that beamed from his dark eyes, as he pronounced her name, and heard the thrilling accents that gave it utterance. Her name, too! Helen Lacy!—tongued so familiarly by a stranger! This last thought roused her: it was a license, fraught with that free and liberal meaning, which maidenly behaviour might not tolerate.

She arose, intending to leave the room. Fitz-Maurice turned, and advanced towards her.

"Your father—" said he.

"Is from home," added Helen, with a faltering voice,—
"but, if it so please you, sir, I will be the bearer of your message, or,—you can await, here, his return."

"I could have wished we had met," replied Fitz-Maurice: "but my will is not the master of my time. Yet it concerns him nearly, what I would impart."

"Shall I acquaint him with it?" said Helen, standing in the act to retire, and with her eyes fixed on the ground.

Fitz-Maurice passed between her and the door, as if he were himself about to depart. He paused for a moment; and the situation of Helen became most embarrassing. She could not now withdraw, without a nearer approach to Fitz-Maurice, than she had resolution to make; she could not return to her seat, without seeming to invite his farther stay; and she could not remain where she was, without increasing confusion.

"I *will* crave your attention, a brief time," said Fitz-Maurice, taking her by the hand, and leading her gently back to her chair. She had now somewhat recovered her wonted self-possession, and she motioned him to sit likewise. He did so; but at such distance as betokened due respect and courtesy.

"You *know* me!" he exclaimed. "I do not mean you can at once pronounce my name. But when *I* do so, your memory will supply the rest; for, I can well believe it hath passed your father's lips. I am Fitz-Maurice! I see I did not err," he continued, observing the involuntary start which Helen gave. "It were well—nay, it must be—that we know each other. It is thus only a great purpose can be fulfilled."

"You left your pillow early, this morning," he added, after a pause, and with much emphasis. "The lark had scarcely hailed the new-born day, ere your steps were towards the path which leads to Margery Ashwell's cottage."

Helen was confounded. But her pride now took the alarm. She could not brook this seeming espial of her actions. With a haughty air she demanded,—

"And what if they were so?"

"*My* father," replied Fitz-Maurice, "lies in his grave; but were he living, and peril environed him, what front of danger, though it glared upon me with the fell tiger's rage, should stay me in my course to save him? *Your* father lives: and the Heavens approve a daughter's pious care. It is the virtue which lends lustre to every virtue, as the sun gives alike its brilliancy to the diamond, and its spotless purity to the pale lily."

This was a theme dear to Helen's heart; and she listened, with pleased attention, to the words of Fitz-Maurice, as they fell from his lips, in those peculiar accents that had already so strangely captivated her. Even while

she listened, she strove to discover wherein lay the fascination of his voice; but she could only compare the effect it produced, to that witchery of sound, which sometimes dwells in a simple strain of melody, such as untaught village maidens wildly chant.

"You love your father?" said Fitz-Maurice.

The countenance and eyes of Helen replied ay! in eloquent silence. They were radiant with filial devotion.

"And you are much troubled for his safety?" he continued.

Helen sighed; while deep sorrow sat upon her features.

"I will not ask you," added Fitz-Maurice, "what it is you fear. Enough that you fear, and are unhappy! I am, myself, the victim of too much misery, not to mourn with those who are in tribulation. And I have felt too severely how tenfold bitter that trouble is which preys upon a lonely spirit, not to proffer consolation to the afflicted."

The melancholy tone of Fitz-Maurice penetrated the heart of Helen. It betrayed such deep-rooted distress—such a long and hopeless acquaintance with many griefs, that she could have wept, if her tears might have fallen unseen. A gentle sigh only breathed through her silent lips.

"You pity me," said Fitz-Maurice. "Nay, blush not, for that I have read your thoughts, nor for them. But, if compassion kindle in your bosom, because you hear me say I am steeped in veriest wretchedness, how would your heart bleed to learn the story of my sufferings? Ah! gentle lady! I could unfold a history, so sad, so full of wo; a life of such sharp adversity; of such prolonged and ceaseless agony; of such fierce trial, that tears and sighs should follow each word, as the blood gushes where the knife is driven. And I could end my melancholy tale with a prayer, even to thee, fair one, so strange, yet so earnest withal, that horror and amazement should be at war within you, as wonder is now. But these things may not yet be voiced; nor came I here to dwell upon them. Let the tide of time roll on. When it bears upon its surface the rare creature who shall unchain me from my mysterious destiny, then shall my invocation be heard."

Fitz-Maurice ceased; and Helen sat mute. She did not comprehend, and she could not, therefore address

herself to his last words; nor, if she had comprehended them, could she the more have spoken.

The pause that ensued was becoming irksome to her, and she ventured to disturb it.

“You talked of my father,” said she.

“Yes,” replied Fitz-Maurice; “and now heed me well. Inquire not how I know—nor what I know—but be satisfied with your own knowledge. You purpose, this night, to be resolved of things that are to come; and if Alascon be not moody and sullen, your utmost questionings will be answered.”

“Alascon!” exclaimed Helen.

“Ay,” said Fitz-Maurice; “and a more potent spirit, or one that sees the future with more unerring ken, dwells not in the earth’s centre. But he is wayward, and will not always be commanded. You should be armed with power to compel his obedience.”

“How?” inquired Helen, with a trembling voice.

“Why, thus,”—answered Fitz-Maurice. “Peverell comes here anon—and others with him. You must be present; and when he stands beside you, musing, demand of him a golden signet. Say nor more nor less, than this—*the golden signet—it is mine!* He will render it to thee, which when thou hast, place it on thy wedding finger, nor remove it till the sun hath thrice and thrice descended in the west. When thou art confronted with Alascon, should he be moody, surly, or fain to palter with thee, full in his eyes hold thou thy encircled finger, and cry—*if thou refuse to answer to earth-born powers, I command thee, OBEY THE SIGNET!* At this behest, he is yours, for whatsoe’er thou wilt; so it be not beyond him. But, neglect not in the smallest part, what I have enjoined; for in the smallest part, as in the whole, lies the virtue of that, through which your troubled spirit seeks repose.”

Helen listened to these injunctions with mute attention. She did not feel quite assured she should need them; her resolution might fail her at the last; but it was soothing to her anxious mind to know that she could be thus fore-armed.

“I exact no pledge,” continued Fitz-Maurice. “What you do, must be done freely—I only possess you of the means to effect your will, thus formed, and thus exerted. For myself, lady, if one so unworthy, and a stranger,

might prefer a suit, I would say—go on! More than a father's life—more than a daughter's sacrifice—more weal or wo than your imagination can conceive—hang upon your resolves. We shall meet again! Certainly, again! and again! Perhaps, many a time and oft when all that is now dark shall appear in noon-day brightness; and when he who calls himself, Fitz-Maurice, shall worship a name which then will be enshrined in his very heart."

The fervent and impassioned manner, with which he uttered these words, alarmed Helen. It was so unlike the calm, subdued tone of his previous conversation, and was accompanied by such evident agitation of his feelings. He perceived her emotion.

"Forgive," said he, in his wonted accents, "a warmth, and energy, into which I was for a moment betrayed, by the maddening recollections of the past, by the stinging consciousness of the present, and, last, not least, by the almost frantic glimpses of the future. Your pardon and your pity! So imploring, I bid you farewell."

He departed. Helen heard his descending steps; and the sound of horses' feet immediately after, told her he was gone. She felt inexpressibly relieved. It was as if she were once more the mistress of herself, and could look, and breathe, and move, without restraint. She had leisure, too, to collect her scattered thoughts, which she had vainly striven to do, while in the whirlwind of those feelings excited by the presence and discourse of Fitz-Maurice.

And whence that presence? Did he expect to see her father? Or did he choose his time, with the certain knowledge he should see her only? His whole manner attested the latter. He had come, to foster and support the secret resolution of her shrinking heart. But, how did he know any such resolution was struggling there? Those mysteries and emphatic words, too: *it were well, nay, it must be, that we know each other. It is thus only a great purpose can be fulfilled!* And again; *more than a father's life, more weal or wo than your imagination can conceive, hang upon your resolves.* Yet, why recall these words alone? Was not every one he uttered a teeming mystery? Were not his every look and action fraught with strange meanings? Why, else, their spell-like in-

fluence? Or why those unbidden tears, those chilling tremors, and that delirium of the senses, when he spoke, as if his voice were some dulcet strain of magic harmony?

These reflections crowded on the brain of Helen so fast, that she grew bewildered. She sat for nearly an hour in a state bordering upon stupor. At length they began to subside; when, disentangling from the confused mass, two or three distinct images, she brought them under the control of her reason, and meditated again upon that daring project which occupied her thoughts when Fitz-Maurice entered so unexpectedly.



CHAPTER XVIII.

It was, indeed, true as Fitz-Maurice had said; "the lark had scarcely hailed the new-born day, ere Helen's steps were towards the path that led to Margery Ashwell's cottage."

This Margery Ashwell lived in a most lonely spot, at the end of a long and narrow lane, deeply overshadowed by lofty trees, in the midst of which stood her little hut. She had out-numbered threescore years and ten, and was nearly bent double with age. No human habitation stood within a mile of hers; and no human being, except herself, dwelt within her own habitation. She was known to have dealings with the invisible world of spirits, for many were the proofs she had given of her powerful art; but she was accused of much more malignant mischief than she ever committed.

If any neighbouring farmer, or his wife, sickened, it was because the hag Margery had stuck a heart of wax full of magic needles; or had made an exact image of the sick person in wax, and roasted it before a slow fire; the marrow of the sufferer melting away, drop by drop, as the image itself dissolved. If any thing went wrong in the dairy, the witch Ashwell had hurt their churnings. No accident could happen to their cattle, whether a horse fell lame, or a sheep were found dead in a ditch, or a

milch cow lost her milk, or swine perished, but she had bewitched them. They did not scruple, indeed, to go still farther, and affirm that she raised storms which hurled down lofty oaks, though rooted a century in the earth; that she would blast vineyards, orchards, and meadows in a single night; and convey away corn or hay, from the barns of such as had offended her, to those of others by whom she had not been denied milk, flour, or a syllabub, now and then. There were some, too, ready to swear they had seen her sail in a sieve; others, in an egg shell; while they had certainly hunted her sometimes in the shape of a rat, and sometimes in that of a black dog, or brindled cat; but always without a tail.

Helen had frequently heard of Margery Ashwell, from her infancy upwards; for the accounts of her exploits, true, or false, filled the mouths of the peasantry, and made her, alternately, the jeer and terror of the surrounding country. It corresponded well, therefore, with Helen's wild imagination, and feverish fears for her father, to seek, by means similar to those which she believed were now working his peril, the power to save him. She did not, indeed, doubt her own ability, by the aid of her books, to perform a charm which should be strong enough to obtain her object; but she doubted her fortitude to go through with it, and she dreaded what might be the horrid penalties of failure. Hence, she resolved to consult Margery Ashwell; and that very morning, taking little Bridget with her, (for she was ignorant of the road, and, besides, wished not to go alone, by unfrequented fields and paths,) she had, at day-break, proceeded thither. But, how Fitz-Maurice knew of her visit, and of what had passed between her and Margery, (or, at least, of part of it,) she could explain only by what she had heard her father say, when speaking of him, that he could scarcely tell whether to call him man or wizard, or a compound of both.

When Helen arrived at the cottage of Margery, she found the old crone in bed, gathered round like a hoop. A large black cat, with sleek fur, and bright blue eyes, lay watching upon her pillow, and there were three baboons, one of them gray with age, and quite blind, littered about the room. Suspended from the centre of the roof was a blue phial, containing a huge toad, which was

alive, though then apparently in a torpid state. Some human bones, a skull, and what seemed to be the body of a new-born infant, with the dried skin of a water snake coiled tightly round its neck, and two glow worms shining in the sockets instead of eyes, stood on a table in a dark corner near the fire-place. In the opposite corner was a brood of enormous rats, sweltering in blood, which was contained in a brazen caldron.

Helen looked fearfully at these hideous objects; and Bridget, who had a very orthodox terror of witches, whispered in her ear, "Plenty of fright, your ladyship."

"Enter," said Margery, when Helen tapped at the door; "enter! I can sleep without bars or bolts. I thought I should see a stranger before I saw the sun to-day, for my old hip-bone has never ceased to ache since the first cock-crow. Let me see," she continued, wiping away the rheum from her eyes, "who is it seeks me? Ay, I warrant I am right enough—Madam Lacy, or a fat pig; but, an' it be not the latter, I'll be sworn it is Madam Helen Lacy."

"The same," said Helen.

"I knew it was," quoth Margery. "And your errand? My taper burned red last night. A man of war is dead (says Hilco) when pale lights are red. But what is thine errand, thou sorrowful maiden?"

The heart of poor Helen almost died within her, when the hag uttered these words,

"A man of war's dead,
When pale lights are red."

It was as if she had heard her father's funeral knell. Bridget, also, noted the dismal prophecy which they seemed to contain; but, observing the effect they had produced upon her mistress, she again gave vent to one of her laconic whispers—"Laugh, my lady!"

"How!" exclaimed Margery, in an angry voice, "you are not alone!—you disturb me!" And she drew, nearly over her head, the curiously wrought coverlet under which she lay. It seemed to be made of the spotted hide of some strange animal, and the four corners were dyed with hieroglyphic characters, in colours of bright yellow, purple, and azure.

"I meant not to offend," said Helen, timidly, (while she signified, by a look to Bridget, that she should wait on the outside)—"but it was far to come—and, besides, I knew not the path to your dwelling."

"Well, well," quoth the beldam, in somewhat gentler phrase, "it is a fault soon mended, I perceive. And now, once more, the cause of this, your early visit, here? But stay—you are weary, and would sit.—What! ho! Hopdance! Where are you? Hopdance!—my son—come to me."

Helen looked round to see whom Margery was calling; when she beheld, with astonishment, one of the baboons (the largest of the three) spring upon the bed; and, afterwards, at a signal which it understood, leap towards its mistress, and lie down close by her face. She fondled the chattering, grinning animal for a moment; then patted it on the head; and repeating a few words, unintelligible to Helen, it bounded to the floor, whirled three times round, as if for joy, and twisted its lithe body into the form of a low stool, at her feet.

"There, rest thee," said Margery, "and confess that thou never hadst a more delicate seat."

Helen hesitated. She could not believe it was intended she should make that use of the creature, and she had no fancy, moreover, for such a ticklish kind of chair.

"Sit, sit," continued Margery, "or Hopdance will grow sullen and mischievous. It is not every one to whom he will thus offer himself, even at my bidding; but he is gentle and gracious this morning."

Helen, with some difficulty, overcame her repugnance; and, with some apprehension of toppling to the ground, took her seat, as she was commanded. It was certainly not what she expected to find it; for, could she have forgotten it was a live stool, she might have called it a comfortable one. As soon as she felt a little at her ease, she unfolded to Margery Ashwell the reasons of her visit.

"And you would learn, through me," said Margery, when Helen concluded, "if my art can do it, two things: what dangers threaten your father's life,—and what charm or spell can save him from them?"

"Even so," replied Helen.

"Be silent as the grave," added she, "while I commune with myself. Speak not till I speak."

Helen scarcely breathed, as she gazed at the old hag, who closed her eyes, but seemed by the motion of her lips, to be muttering certain words. She lay thus for nearly ten minutes. Once or twice, her face was slightly convulsed. Helen fancied, too, (though she quickly strove to convince herself it was only fancy,) that, at these moments, there was a trembling of the walls and floor. At length, the withered beldam unclosed her eyes, and turning them upon Helen, with a wild and frightful expression—

“You MAY be satisfied,” said she.

“When, and how?” exclaimed Helen, eagerly.

“Soft, awhile,” replied Margery; “there be conditions.”

“Name them!” said Helen, with the same impetuosity of manner.

“Not now,” answered Margery. “Take till midnight to know thyself.”

“Midnight!” exclaimed Helen.

“Ay; it must be midnight, deep, dark midnight. And if at that drear hour, when the screech owl is heard, and yawning graves send forth their unblest dead—thou canst return—do so.”

“Alone?” said Helen.

“Alone, *when* you pass my threshold,” replied Margery, “nor (let who may attend thy steps,) must man, woman, or child, be within ear-shot, *after*.”

“At midnight!” repeated Helen, shuddering.

“Even with the hour—even with the very hour,” said Margery.

“And when I come?” continued Helen—

“I will not be questioned now,” interrupted the hag—
“go as ye came—or come again.”

“You shall see me at midnight,” said Helen, after a pause.

“What sayest thou, Flibbert?” exclaimed Margery, casting her eyes towards the roof. Helen’s followed in the same direction. She perceived the toad, which was suspended exactly over her head, crawling up the side of the phial, and its body swollen and transparent, so that the green and scarlet spots, with which it was covered, were distinctly visible. She did not observe that the phial was closed at the top, and terrified, lest the loath-

some reptile should drop upon her, she started from her seat; when the baboon, in an instant, untwisted itself, and again whirling round three times, squatted on its haunches, in the corner where Helen had first noticed it, upon entering the cottage.

"'Tis a spiteful urchin," said Margery, perceiving Helen's alarm, "but it cannot come out. I have penned it there ever since it bit my dug when sleeping, and festered it with poison. I know what disturbs it now," she continued, darting an angry glance at it, from her small, sharp, gray eyes. "Down, malice! down, hell-seed!—sleep, spit-fire! What! must I make thee?"

The filthy creature seemed to know it was commanded, for Helen could see its sides heave and pant, as it were with rage, while drops of black froth spirted from its jaws, as it slowly descended again to the bottom of the phial.

Helen now prepared to leave, after repeating her assurance of returning at midnight.

"Wear your mouth in your heart till then, as the wise ones of the earth ever do, and that which thou seekest thou shalt find," said Margery. "Go. But let thy follower here, be thy forerunner home. Several ways direct passengers into the town: take thou one, she another. And whatso'er thou seest, have no tongue, no fear. Fountains run by many winding and mazy currents, into one main river; rivers, by sundry channels, into one main ocean; perplex not thyself, therefore, to know how events shall work to one main end. Begone! for I must be busy."

Helen left the cottage, and found Bridget seated on the stump of a tree, weeping bitterly. She never expected to see her mistress again; for she was certain she had beheld her shadow flit past her, followed by four witches with long beards, bearing a white coffin in their hands. She did not tell Helen of this vision, lest it should terrify her; but she believed it most devoutly, notwithstanding the ocular proof before her, that, at any rate, Helen was not yet dead.

In strict obedience to the injunctions of Margery, Helen now sent Bridget home by herself; and, without certainly knowing whither it would lead her, but keeping the lofty towers of the Abbey in view, as a sort of guide, she pursued a separate path. She was thus hastening along,

full of anxious thoughts, and agitated by conflicting feelings, when she crossed the field in which lay the body of Fortescue, where Peverell saw her. She did not once look at Peverell, and hence her non-recognition of him afterwards. The mangled remains of Fortescue she could not avoid seeing; but it was a severe trial of her faith, at that moment, to have neither "tongue nor fear;" not less on account of the sudden shock, caused by such a revolting spectacle, than from another circumstance which utterly amazed her.



CHAPTER XIX.

HELEN had studiously avoided her father that day, and pleaded, through Bridget, a slight indisposition, as a reason for keeping her chamber. She might, in truth, have urged a stronger plea; for what with her previous anxiety, a sleepless night (or such sleep only as irritated, instead of nourishing the body,) and the strong excitement produced by the occurrences of the morning, her naturally delicate frame was suffering under serious debility. The unexpected and mysterious interview with Fitz-Maurice had greatly increased her sufferings, both mental and bodily; and she hardly dreaded her midnight appointment with Margery Ashwell, more than she did her task of demanding the golden signet from Peverell, in the presence of her father and the rest. But she was determined to perform it. "What daughter could do less for such a father," she exclaimed to herself, "and yet be worthy of him?"

Lacy returned while Helen was absorbed in these reflections. She rose to meet him, with as much serenity of countenance and hilarity of manner, as she could command; but her languid eyes, flushed cheeks, and anxious brow, sufficiently proclaimed that her indisposition of the morning had not abated. Lacy tenderly expressed his fears that her sickness was greater than she would allow, and urged her to see the doctor. Helen laughed at the idea, assured her father that it was a mere momentary ailment, and then told him of Peverell's visit.

"I met him," said Lacy, "and expect him, with my little regiment, as I call them, in something less than half an hour. He informs me he has some fresh wonder to tell, which is to convince us all that we must visit the Abbey again."

"Said I not it would be so?" replied Helen.

"You did," answered Lacy; "but it is yet to know what this wonder is, and whether we shall consider it as Peverell does."

"Methinks I should like to hear what it is myself," observed Helen.

"And thou mayest, if thou wilt," replied her father. "Abide here till they come; and I will propose that you be admitted of our council. Who knows but thy woman's wit may shame ours in this business."

Helen gladly accepted the offer; for so, only, could she demand the golden signet.

"There has been another seeking you," she said, and her voice faltered a little.

"Who?" inquired Lacy.

"Fitz-Maurice."

"Fitz-Maurice!" he exclaimed; "that does indeed surprise me."

"He said, he could have wished you had met," continued Helen, "for that it concerned you nearly, what he would impart. I pressed to be the bearer of his message; but it seemed it could not be so conveyed."

"I wish we had met," replied Lacy: "I should have liked well, a quiet interchange of words with him, for an hour or so. Does he return?"

"That, he did not say," answered Helen, with increased confusion; for she remembered his words, "*we shall certainly meet again and again*—and it seemed almost like paltering with truth, to make the distinction she had. Still she felt it was impossible, at that moment, to disclose what had passed; and lest, therefore, her father should become more particular in his questions, she was about to change the matter of discourse, when the door opened, and De Clare entered. After mutual salutations had been exchanged between him and Helen, Lacy mentioned his intention of proposing that she should be admitted of their council.

"It would require the silver tongue of our friend Mor-

timer," observed De Clare, "to say all the gracious things proper on such an occasion. I am ill at these honeyed phrases: but," he continued, bowing to Helen, "there is nothing he may protest by his manhood, or his veracity, which shall exceed what I feel, at so honoured an addition."

"This Mortimer," said Helen, gracefully acknowledging the compliment of De Clare, "is a man of picked speech, and refined observances, I presume?"

"The very perfection of a lady's gallant," replied De Clare; "your only true knight—for he never talks from the head."

"Then how should he talk to the heart?" answered Helen.

"How he should," rejoined De Clare, "surpasses my judgment to discover; why he does, it is for you, who have hearts thus assailable, to explain."

"I shrewdly suspect," said Helen, "that these mere talkers, as you describe them, succeed better with their own hearts than with ours; and that the triumphs they boast, are like those we win when we reason with ourselves, a victory where there is no spoil, because there is no enemy."

"Oh, that Nicholas Mortimer could hear you!" exclaimed De Clare. "He would overwhelm you with a flood of words, and, at most, a single drop of reason; or, incontinently go hang himself in his silken garters."

"Neither the one nor the other," replied Helen, playfully. "For his words, they would rebound—because, as I take it, they are of a cork-like quality—light and floating: and, for his silken garters, he would forget to hang himself while he was admiring how well their colour became him."

"You are beaten out of the field," said Lacy, laughing, "so surrender yourself."

De Clare smiled. "I think I am so far disabled," said he, "that if I do not surrender, I must at least sound a retreat."

They were now joined by Peverell, mine host, Walwyn, and Vehan; and in a few moments after, Hoskyns, Mortimer, Wilfrid Overbury, and Owen Rees arrived. Helen thought she had never seen so truculent and ferocious an aspect as that of Overbury, and she half shud-

dered at his uncouth and brutish salutation of her. The flutter and grimaces of Mortimer scarcely attracted her notice. Nor did she much observe any of the rest, except Peverell, towards whom she directed many a searching look, as if she would at once penetrate his mystery, or read what was passing in his mind. Peverell, too, contemplated Helen with a degree of interest which he would not have experienced, but for the certainty he felt that he had seen her in the morning, under the peculiar circumstances already mentioned.

Almost the first topic of conversation among them, was the situation of Clayton. Peverell had made repeated inquiries during the day, but each time the same answer was given, that no alteration had taken place. "It was a grievous state to be in," he observed; "though, as he learned, he had remained much longer in a similar one, on a former occasion."

"Who has seen or heard of Fitz-Maurice to-day?" inquired Hoskyns.

"I have seen him," answered Peverell.

"And I have heard of him," replied Lacy. "My daughter was more fortunate; she saw him."

"Where?" exclaimed Peverell, eagerly.

"In this very chamber, I believe," said Lacy. "Was it not so, Helen?"

"Yes," she replied.

"When?" continued Peverell, addressing himself to Helen.

"Something more than two hours since; or thereabouts."

Peverell drew near to Helen; and inquired with much earnestness, what had been the object of his visit; whether he had mentioned his (Peverell's) name; and if he had intimated any intention of returning. "For," said he, "when he left me this morning, after an interview of only a few minutes, it was with an assurance I should see him again to-day."

Helen evaded the first question of Peverell, by simply stating that he had called to speak with her father; and answered the other two, in the negative.

"He will not fail me," observed Peverell, "I feel satisfied of that; but 'tis strange, what you have reported."

The rest were occupied, at this moment, in discussing

the probabilities of Clayton's ultimate recovery. Peverell stood by Helen's chair, musing upon what she had just communicated. No eye was directed towards her, no ear disengaged from the general conversation. It was a favourable moment, such a one as might not occur again, (such a one, indeed, as she had not expected,) for obeying the injunction of Fitz-Maurice. She resolved to seize it. She laid her hand, gently, on the arm of Peverell, to be certain of fixing his attention, and exclaimed, at the same instant, in a firm, but subdued tone of voice, "The golden signet—it is mine!"

Peverell started. A look from Helen, while she placed her finger on her lips, told him she would have him silent. He drew the signet from his pocket; gave it her, unseen of any one, as he passed her; and walking up to the others, fell in, at once, with their conversation about Clayton, by saying, in reply to an observation from Walwyn, "that he believed the doctor still entertained some hope of his being restored."

Helen felt grateful for the quick delicacy with which he had both understood and fulfilled her wish; and, placing the signet on her left hand, as Fitz-Maurice had directed, she was surprised to find, that though somewhat too large, it clipped her finger, as if with the elastic pressure of a spring.

"Well," said Mortimer, addressing Peverell, "let us hope that the doctor will prove right. But now, what have you to say, touching this same Abbey, and our farther visits to it?" Then, turning towards Helen, and approaching her with a mincing step, "What think *you*, Madam?" he exclaimed; "are we not adventurous spirits to hold such revels with the prince of darkness?"

"If," replied Helen, gravely, you believe it *is* with the prince of darkness you hold your revels, you are profane, not adventurous spirits."

"Are you answered, sir?" said De Clare.

"Yes," replied Mortimer, gaily, "and rebuked too. But mere mortals must expect as much, when they discourse with angels."

Helen smiled; not altogether scornfully, though it would have been difficult to say what smile it was, and exclude scorn from the definition. She made no reply; and Mortimer remained silent. De Clare's eyes sparkled with malicious joy.

"Come," said Walwyn, "let us hear what it is Peverell has to impart. It may be of such relevancy and weight, as to induce us to resume our watchings this night in the Abbey."

"I know not how that may be," replied Peverell, "but I am sure it will amaze you."

He then related his stroll into the fields that morning; the incident of the black shaggy-haired cur; the finding of the body of a murdered man, and the discovery, by mine host, of its being the body of Fortescue. But, before he mentioned any thing of the cross, or the purse, he stated the extraordinary event which subsequently occurred, of the total disappearance of the corpse, appealing to Wintour for a corroboration of the fact. Mine host confirmed it, with a most perplexing gravity of face.

Helen listened to Peverell's narrative with breathless attention; especially that portion of it which related to the murder of Fortescue. She knew it must have been Peverell whom she passed, and she wondered whether he had recognised her. She had heard enough. Indeed, she was not aware there was any thing more to tell; for it never once entered her thoughts, that the golden signet which she had been instructed by Fitz-Maurice to demand of Peverell, had any connexion with Fortescue; still less that it had belonged to him. Anxious to gain the freedom of solitude, she arose, and spite of some faint entreaties from Mortimer, De Clare, and Peverell, retired to her own chamber.



CHAPTER XX.

WHEN Helen was gone, De Clare, addressing Peverell, said, "And is this all?"

"No," replied Peverell, gravely, and a little nettled by the blunt question of De Clare, "this is *not* all: but if it were, it is more than you, or any of us can explain."

He then related his taking the gold chain and crystal cross, from the body of Fortescue.

"Well," observed De Clare, "this is an important addition, certainly. Some love-token, I suppose, of a now disconsolate mistress, who will hear of his fate on Monday, weep all Tuesday, and dress for a new lover on Wednesday."

"Why, it seems some such bauble, I confess," answered Peverell, determined to lay a snare for the stubborn and almost offensive scepticism of De Clare. "Here it is," he added, drawing it forth; "look at it, and make what you can of it."

De Clare took it in his hand, and after examining it a little, passed it to Lacy, observing, "It is a rich toy, I grant; and I should think worth the finding."

Lacy started, as he received it from De Clare. He looked at it eagerly; viewed it on all sides; examined the chain; then the cross; and turning to Peverell, said, "Did you take this from the neck of Fortescue?"

"With mine own hands," replied Peverell. "Why do you ask?"

Lacy re-examined it with the most minute attention, particularly one corner, at the back of the cross; then, handing it to Walwyn, he repeated his question, "You took it from the neck of Fortescue?"

"Let mine host vouch for me," said Peverell, "if mine own ay be not sufficient."

"It is not your word I doubt," replied Lacy; "but——"

"But what?" interrupted Peverell.

"I may tell you hereafter," rejoined Lacy.

The chain and cross were passed, from one to the other, till it returned again to Peverell. They all agreed it was a splendid ornament; but beyond that, they saw nothing to note.

"And now," said De Clare, "I suppose we have heard all, and seen all?"

"You may have heard all," replied Peverell, "but you certainly have not seen all. Take this cross again; look at it well; and tell me what you discover."

De Clare did so. "I discover nothing," said he, "but what I did at first—a costly jewel."

"Hold it to that taper, replied Peverell; "hold it close; and then tell me what there is upon the transverse piece."

De Clare obeyed. "This is a trick!" he exclaimed.

"On my soul, no!" said Peverell, with great energy. De Clare again held the cross to the taper, and, after a pause, said, "Listen, gentlemen: here is matter worth our special notice." He then repeated the lines:—

**"Let no man falter but proceed:
All that has been, was all decreed;
All that must be, must all succeed:
Be firm of purpose—firm of deed."**

"Give it me!" exclaimed Lacy. He read the same words: and was not content with a second, but had a third perusal of them. All the rest satisfied their impatient curiosity; and Peverell now related the way in which he had at first discovered this extraordinary floating scroll.

"I own myself a convert," said De Clare, after a pause, to one thing—that there is an unfathomable mystery about this thing: but I am firm to my opinion of last night, that, mystery or no mystery, we are at child's play, till we know farther."

"Own something more," exclaimed Overbury; "that you are afraid to go on; and then add, if you like, that you are firm in your opinion. The child's play lies in your fears."

De Clare was silent. He merely turned upon Overbury a glance of sovereign contempt. But Owen Rees at once took up the gauntlet, which Overbury had thrown down.

"You are right," said the Welchman, "it is childish to have fears and frights, mark you: but you are not right, mark you, when, like a bully, you tell a gentleman he is a coward."

"A bully!" roared out Overbury.

"Yes," replied Owen, not at all moved; "a bully, Mister Overbury."

"You shall answer for it!" said Overbury.

"I had better answer for it now," rejoined Owen, "you may forget before to-morrow?"

"You shall answer for it!" repeated Overbury, blowing like a stranded whale.

"I'll tell you how it is," observed Owen, hot in blood, but cool in speech; "I shall be ready to answer long before you are ready to ask."

"Are you crazed?" exclaimed De Clare, holding back Owen Rees, who was advancing to beard Overbury in a way that must have led to a personal contest; "are you crazed? Do you not perceive that this is my quarrel, if it were worth my taking up; and what have you to do with it?"

"If I be reviled," replied Owen, still harping upon the original offence of the mountain goat, "shall I stand still, like a goose or a fool, with my finger in my mouth? Shall I be such an idiot and dizzard, to suffer every man to speak upon me what he lists, to rail what he lists, to vomit forth all his venom, at pleasure?"

"Granted," said De Clare; "but he that *cannot* amend another man's fault, or cannot amend it without his own fault, better it were that one should transgress than two. I concede to you, there *is* a time, when it is meet to answer a fool according to his foolishness, lest he should seem, in his own conceit, to be wise; but it is not profitable now to do so."

Owen was, in some degree, pacified by this exhortation of De Clare; but Overbury took it in high dudgeon, and fancying that De Clare stood in awe of him, whatever the Welchman might do, he determined to goad him still farther.

"I have never known your talkers," said he, "worth the air they spoil with their glib words. Why should the whole flock be accounted tainted, because we have one rotten sheep among us?"

"Is it your cue to brawl?" exclaimed De Clare, scornfully. "If it be, fall to it, and I'll roar as loud as you! But, if you seek to move me, or think that I esteem so poorly of myself to be stirred to wrath by any word of thine, know me better, and spare yourself the trial. When the soaring eagle stoops, in his royal flight, to strike the sparrow, or, what may better suit itself to your apprehension, when the thunderbolts of the salt sea, arm themselves in terror, to chase a scudding pirate, then expect that I will find a motive to quarrel with what you can utter."

"Pirate!" bellowed forth Overbury.

"Ay—pirate," reiterated De Clare,—“the shark of the ocean—the bully of the land. Do you know such a character?"

Overbury scowled at De Clare, and muttered, in a half growl, "You shall writhe for this."

De Clare turned upon his heel, and addressed himself to Walwyn.

"What is your opinion?" said he. "Do you see enough to alter the resolution we all embraced last night?"

"Here is Fitz-Maurice!" exclaimed Peverell, suddenly. "I left instructions where I was to be found, and I hear the clattering of horses' feet on the outside. It is he, I'll be sworn."

Peverell was right. He had scarcely ceased speaking, when Fitz-Maurice entered.

"I sought you at your house," said he to Peverell, "and learning how you had disposed of yourself, hastened hither. It is not my first visit here to-day," he continued, addressing Lacy.

"I heard of your former one," replied Lacy, "and regretted I was not present to receive you."

"It may prove all the better that you were not," answered Fitz-Maurice.

A silence of some minutes ensued. Fitz-Maurice maintained his usual stately reserve, or, rather, his habitually abstracted and contemplative mood. No one liked to accost him; for in spite of themselves they felt a sort of awe in his presence, which they could not shake off.

This feeling was inspired by many causes. The figure of Fitz-Maurice was gigantic: his countenance had a blended expression of sternness and haughty pride: his eye was bold, piercing, and resolute: and his demeanour, eminently dignified. Even his dress—composed entirely of costly sables,—his towering plume of black ostrich feathers,—and his ample cloak, of the same colour, which he always wore in graceful folds round him—tended to heighten the general impression, which was raised to its utmost, by the mystery that invested him. He seemed wholly unconscious of this effect: or, to describe his manner more correctly, he considered it so natural a consequence of his character and qualities, that, like a monarch, who never shows himself but to stand in the general gaze, and be lackeyed by wonder and applause, he received this dumb homage with the most serene indifference. It neither disturbed his thoughts, nor excited them; and he

would remain, as he now did, amidst a silent group, whose silence he knew was the result entirely of his presence, without interrupting, for a moment, the current of his own austere and gloomy meditations. Peverell, from all that had already passed between him and Fitz-Maurice, felt, perhaps, less of this ambiguous influence than the rest; though even he, could not boast of being remarkably at his ease with him. He resolved, however, to address him:

"I informed you, this morning," said he, "of all that had occurred since the night when you watched with us in the Abbey; but after you left me, one thing took place which we cannot, in any manner, explain."

Peverell then mentioned what he had discovered in the crystal cross belonging to Fortescue, placing it at the same time in the hands of Fitz-Maurice, that he might satisfy himself as to the liquid miracle. He looked at it, and read the words without any apparent emotion of surprise.

"You watched last night?" said he.

"We did," replied Peverell.

"And why did you so?" continued Fitz-Maurice.

"Because," answered De Clare, "there seemed to be a reason for it."

"What was that reason?" asked Fitz-Maurice.

"The words inscribed upon the parchment brought by Fortescue—and your own letter to Peverell, dark and incomprehensible as it was," answered De Clare.

"But the first was a juggle," added Overbury, "and the second a ——"

Fitz-Maurice fixed his eyes upon Overbury, without speaking. Overbury tried to bear their terrific expression, but he grew pale, and left his reply unfinished.

"Now, what was there half so positive, half so intelligible," continued Fitz-Maurice, "in either the parchment or the letter, as in this?" holding up the cross.

"But you taught us to expect signs," said Peverell; "and the recollections of *your* words gave authority to those of the parchment."

"And were not my words fulfilled?" asked Fitz-Maurice. "I bade you watch for the signs that should show themselves: you did so; and the signs came. Your looks express incredulity. What was the packet, conveyed by

Fortescue, but those very signs? Nay, if you are critical, and stand upon the literal interpretation of the words, even that will sustain me. When the chimes went nine, you were already in the Abbey; and your being there, was the full accomplishment of that which was to send you there. But was this ALL? I tell you, NO! You had your signs within the walls, as well as without; and you will confess them, ere the moon that now shines, appears again in the heavens."

"It is not more mysteries," said Walwyn, "or more enigmas, that we require: but something that may satisfy us we are called upon to solve those we have."

"What prompted you first to engage in this business?" replied Fitz-Maurice. "Is there one among you who can say? Is there one among you, so reckless of truth, as to avouch that it was an idle fancy of his brain, or a poor conceit to pamper a baby curiosity? Why, then, do you ask a stronger motive to continue than to begin? You came to the enterprise with no better soliciting than your own free choice: and you would now abjure it for no worthier cause than—that you will! Are ye men, and faint so soon? Show us, you cry, in the dull spirit of common natures, what it is we are to perform—mark out our path—set down our task—let us be drudges of the hour, like the base hind who drives his team a-field—and we will execute our homely service. But look into yourselves, and judge for yourselves, whether ye be not fitted for nobler ends? It is the prerogative of minds, touched with the quality of lofty daring, to act from their own suggestions, and not to wait for impulses from without. It is this prerogative which lifts one man above another, in the degree of its presence, as the divinity of reason lifts the species above the brute creation."

"Can you resolve me one thing?" said De Clare. "Is there *any* purpose to be answered, *any* end to be accomplished?"

"Yes!" replied Fitz-Maurice, and his eyes beamed with unwonted animation.

"What end or purpose?" continued De Clare.

"Such a one!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, "as, if it were proclaimed, would make you weep, to think you had endangered its success, but by the obstruction of a hair! Oh that you could know what it is you flee! That you could discern whither it is you are called!"

"And why," replied De Clare, "If we are not to act in that dull spirit of common natures, which you speak of—if we are not to be the drudges of the hour, and execute a homely service—if we are to look into ourselves, and find ourselves fitted for nobler ends—why, I ask, if all these conditions be exacted or implied, are we to be shuffled off from the main point? Why are we to be hoodwinked, in our own despite, and be told to feel proud, because we are so? In short, why can we *not* know what it is we flee? Why can we *not* discern whither it is we are called? Methinks, it is no rare boon we ask when it is only this we ask."

"The quality of a prayer lies in its fitness," said Fitz-Maurice. "Crave pearls from beggars, and you ask only to be denied; entreat what cannot be bestowed, though possessed, and you do the same. A boon is rare, or otherwise, according to the ability of the giver, not the desires of the receiver. But again, I say to you, it were far nobler ye shrink not, because you have commenced, than that you proceed, because the reward glitters before you. Will not the common herd fling the taunt of fear in your teeth? Will they not, if you pause now, after what is known, cry aloud in your streets, Behold the valiant ones! whom shadows could affright!"

"Ha, ha!" exclaimed Overbury, "that was my say, only not in such choice words; and I was rated for it—called bully—pirate—shark of the ocean—and I know not what. Lay your tongues now to such revilings, an' ye dare! Belike, it would obtain for you prompt payment of that which I still owe you."

"Pray," said Mortimer, twisting his mustachio, "might a plain man be so bold as to inquire whether you are yourself in the secret?"

"Shall I be believed, if I answer?" replied Fitz-Maurice.

"Most veritably, yes," rejoined Mortimer—"by myself—and I undertake for the rest."

"I am!" said Fitz-Maurice.

"Your proof," continued Mortimer—"your proof!"

"I thought I had your word," interrupted Fitz-Maurice, "that I should be believed. It is suspicion that calls for proofs."

Mortimer was silent; and a pause of several minutes

ensued. At length De Clare, with a collected energy of voice and manner, which bespoke a resolution deliberately taken, addressed Fitz-Maurice:

"You will not deem me uncourteous," said he, "in what I am about to speak; but the occasion calls for it. In brief, then,—who are you? whence come you? and how have you obtained the knowledge you confess to?"

The abrupt boldness of these questions excited the greatest surprise, and the eyes of all were turned upon Fitz-Maurice, to observe their effect. They embraced precisely the essential points, respecting which they all hungered for information; but De Clare was the only one among them, with firmness enough to make the comprehensive inquiry. Overbury, indeed, could have done as much, after his own fashion; but what would have been insolent curiosity in him, was the mere expression of a just and proper wish, uttered in the freedom of a manly spirit, spoken by De Clare. A momentary flush passed over the features of Fitz-Maurice, which was succeeded by rather more than their usual paleness; and Peverell observed, that he once or twice carried his hand to his forehead, as if he suffered from some pain there.

"You may suppose," said he, "that had it been my will to be known, I should not, from the first, have thrown around myself, and all that pertains to me, the cloud of mystery, you seek to penetrate. Conclude, 'then, that the same causes, whatsoever they may be, which have made me thus, will keep me so. Who am I? Fitz-Maurice! No more. Whence come I? Whither I return. This is nothing, you exclaim. But this is ALL, that tortures most refined could wring from me! Tear out my heart—you cannot tear out my secret with it. Had I ten thousand lives, and you as many deaths to take them, each death more fierce and horrible than what went before, and the last, the pangs of all in one, I would not buy them off, at the price you aim at. And yet,—which, pray, note—I, who speak this, and speak it in tried fortitude of soul—believe, that ere we are one week nearer our graves, the whole will lie fair and open before you. Another word, and I have done. How have I obtained the knowledge I confess to? E'en as I have obtained the power to make you, and all men, confess me what I am. But, told I not enough, when in the Abbey I disclosed

who had been the instructor of my youth? That I told you truly, let the events which followed declare for me. And now, mark me farther. In the words of this mystic exhortation, I pronounce,

“All that has been, was all decreed,”

“And by the same authority, I prophesy,

“All that must be, must all succeed.”

“The current rolls on—and it will do so, overcoming, sooner or later, all that now frets and warps its course; till, at the last, it shall work itself a smooth and even channel, to the mighty ocean of time, past, present, and to come?”

Fitz-Maurice ceased. His countenance beamed with a fervid and intense expression of sublime feeling; his lips moved in silence for a few moments, as if he were in earnest prayer; and a tear, even, trembled, in his eyes, giving a liquid brightness to their wonted fire. There was a dignity, an energy, a solemnity in his manner, and a grace in his elocution, aided, as it was, by the peculiar and fascinating melody in his voice, which had entirely subdued those whom he addressed. The wish no longer existed, to dispute his control, or question his motives; and when De Clare, after a considerable pause, ventured to ask what period must elapse before these things could be accomplished, which depended, it seemed, upon their continued watchings in the Abbey, it was rather for his own individual satisfaction, than from any desire to scrutinize the designs of Fitz-Maurice.

“Be firm of purpose,” he replied, “for twice the time ye have already been, and all mystery shall cease.”

“Four nights more,”—said De Clare.

“Four,” responded Fitz-Maurice.

“Are we agreed, gentlemen?” exclaimed Hoskyns; “if so, let me swear you on my sword;” and he drew his rapier forth.

They all kissed the weapon, except Overbury, who refused.

“There needs no oath to bind me,” he said; “an’ if there did, it should be to something more than words. What am I here for, but to do that, unsworn, which none

of ye will do the better for being sworn? You call yourselves men; but must have glib phrases to make you so. Your oaths will prove as flimsy as your resolutions, I guess."

"You have been at sea, I think?" said Mortimer.

"Ay," replied Overbury: "I have had the salt spray upon my beard, before you sucked."

"It is a pity, methinks," continued Mortimer, "that you are not there now."

"Why?" rejoined Overbury.

"Because we could spare you," said Mortimer.

"Not yet," added Fitz-Maurice. "What is your complaint?" he continued, addressing himself sternly to Overbury.

"My—complaint—say you?" stammered out Overbury.

"Ay!" answered Fitz-Maurice striding up to him. "How is it that I have failed to satisfy you alone? What is it you require, more than I have done and said, to win you? I am not the *only* man in this world, who has a secret buried in his heart;" and he rivetted his eyes upon Overbury, who looked, or rather scowled, at him with an air of sullen surprise.

"Your words seem to have a meaning," said he, which, I do not understand."

"You are Wilfrid Overbury," replied Fitz Maurice, his eyes still fixed upon him,—“some five years since, master of the SCORPION, bound on a voyage to the Adriatic. Am I right?"

"You are," answered Overbury, assuming a careless tone; "and a brave vessel she was: a better, never buffeted the tempest or the wave."

"You were delicately freighted," said Fitz-Maurice.

"I carry not in my mind *now*," replied Overbury, "what her cargo was."

"On your return," continued Fitz Maurice, "it was high summer, and a calm came on, off the coast of Sicily——"

"Hush!—hush!" exclaimed Overbury, while his hideous face looked ghastly with terror.

"I see you are moved," said Fitz-Maurice; "another time, I'll *satisfy* you farther. Enough for the present;" and he turned from him.

Overbury eyed Fitz-Maurice, as he would any one who had whispered in his ear that which he believed no living tongue, save his own, could utter. The rest were in amazement. It was evident Fitz-Maurice knew more than he chose to tell; and it was equally evident Overbury dreaded the disclosure. Yet, how the former should have been so familiarly acquainted with the circumstances he had mentioned, was inexplicable. Owen Rees felt sorely disappointed; for he expected to hear something, which would have soothed his still rankling wound, by placing Overbury in his power. Indeed, there was not one of them who would have regretted to find, that the past life of Overbury matched with their present opinions of him.

"What should we do to-night?" said Walwyn, addressing Fitz-Maurice.

"Sworn to your purpose as you now are," he replied, "and, moreover, resolved beyond your swearing, the intermission of it, or otherwise, must be as you shall determine of yourselves. I may not bid you go or stay, in what respects the particular time of either. Be this your oracle," he continued, taking up the cross from the table, and restoring it to Peverell—

"Let no man falter, but—proceed."

"I wonder," observed mine host, turning to Peverell, "whether the gold signet, which you found in Fortescue's purse, has any thing curious belonging to it, as well as the cross?"

"A gold signet, and a purse!" exclaimed De Clare. "So then, it seems, we have not either heard all or seen all. Come, sir," he continued, addressing Peverell, "let us know the contents of the purse, and behold the wonders of the signet."

Fitz-Maurice laid his hand upon Peverell's shoulder, and, in a half jesting mood, said, "Share your purse with your friends; but, if you would have friends, still leave something in your purse. It is what you keep there, not what you let forth, that keeps them."

At this moment, the door opened, and Fitz-Maurice's dwarf page entered. He scarcely stood three feet in height, but had large-spread limbs, suited to a body double his size, with a monstrous head, and a complexion as

swarthy as an African's. His features were as disproportioned as his legs and arms, for his eyes and mouth usurped nearly the whole of his face; the rest being concealed by a profusion of long, black, wiry hair, which descended in matted locks from his head. He crawled, rather than walked—his broad feet, as he patted along the floor, resembling more the huge paws of an animal than the step of a human being. He was attired, like Fitz-Maurice, in sable vestments, and wore a dagger by his side, the handle of which blazed with the reflected hues of rubies, amethysts, and diamonds.

"Your palfrey is impatient, and so am I!" said he, (dragging himself towards Fitz-Maurice,) and in a voice which grated upon the ear.

"I come, Mephosto!" replied Fitz-Maurice. "Tarry yet awhile, and I come."

"Your courser strikes the earth," replied the dwarf, "and would be gone!"

"Anon—anon!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice.

"He has seen the north-star fall!" croaked the misshapen lump of flesh. "His mane is erect, and floating on the wind."

"I have yet a minute, then!" said Fitz-Maurice.

"Not the beating of ten seconds!" continued Mephosto, in a voice of thunder, while his eyes flashed fury. "My hand is on the dragon's forked tongue!" and he grasped the blazing hilt of his dagger.

"Malignant fiend!" exclaimed Fitz-Maurice, and rushed out, followed by Mephosto, whose countenance brightened into an expression of savage exultation.

"Don't you think there is a strong smell of brimstone?" whispered mine host, to Peverell, whose thoughts, however, were too deeply occupied with what he had just seen, to heed the question. Wintour did not repeat it; but his nose, for some time, was diligently employed in endeavouring to ascertain the fact.

"Well, well!" said Owen Rees. "To see what miracles and wonders there are upon the earth, as well as above it, and below it! I have heard of the black doings of our own terrible magician, Glendower; and I have seen, in my time, too, some very pretty witchcrafts, before I left Wales, and since; but nothing I have seen shall equal this, I warrant you."

"Two hours ago," observed De Clare, "and I would have argued this matter; but I hold it foolery now to jangle with any of my senses. I have bound my reason their slave for four days, and am resolved to wear my chains meekly the while."

"I am of your mind," said Walwyn.

"And I equally, by my faith!" added Mortimer; "so much so, that if I find myself, anon, walking home upon my head, I protest I'll not once inquire what has become of my heels."

"What say you?" murmured Vehan, folding his arms and crossing his legs. "You would not let your head inquire after your heels? That were to be unjust: for your heels have many a time done the office of your head, and carried you out of dangers, from which all your wit could not have saved you."

"Is that you, Monsieur Silence?" replied Mortimer. "How long is it since you last spoke? Are you never startled when you hear your own voice? Your quips are like Christmas—we have them only once a year."

"A truce—a truce!" exclaimed Lacy. "We are forgetting the golden signet, and the treasures of the purse."

Peverell had hoped that the sudden entrance of Fitz-Maurice's dwarf, and the extraordinary scene which followed, would have saved him from farther questioning respecting the signet. He would not stoop to a falsehood, and he could not tell the exact truth. He had been ruminating, too, upon the remarkable words of Fitz-Maurice, in which, as he read them, under the guise of a moral precept, he had conveyed an intelligible intimation, that the manner in which the signet had been disposed of should not be disclosed. Not that he needed any such suggestion; for, from the moment when Helen demanded it, he had been satisfied that her demand was, like the circumstance of Fortescue's murder, only a fresh link in the mysterious chain of events. He felt, therefore, that no course remained open to him, now that he was again pressed upon the subject, but to involve it in studied obscurity.

"Here is the purse," said he, in reply to Lacy; "it contains merely a few pieces of gold; and when you con-

sider that Fortescue fell into the hands of our host here, you may well be puzzled to account for there being any."

"But the signet—where is the golden signet?" said Walwyn, turning the purse inside out.

"It is not there," replied Peverell.

"We see as much," observed De Clare.

"It has been demanded of me," continued Peverell.

"By whom?" exclaimed Mortimer.

"I must not be questioned farther," replied Peverell, calmly.

They desisted at once. The character of Peverell stood too high, and his conduct throughout this business had been marked by too much of honour, of manliness, and of urbanity, to permit that they should treat lightly, or with the most distant approach to disrespect, any wish he might express. The discourse, therefore, was turned immediately to other topics; but, chiefly, to the point, whether they should go to the Abbey that night, or defer it till the ensuing evening. It was urged by De Clare, Walwyn, Mortimer, Lacy, and Peverell himself, that the reply of Fitz-Maurice, when Walwyn asked him "what they should do to-night?" left them at perfect liberty to exercise their own discretion; and, under all circumstances, that discretion would be most soundly exercised, they contended, by postponing, at least for a single night, the renewal of their watching. Nor was one consideration wholly excluded, in coming to this decision; which was, that if they went that night, they could not find the same comfortable preparations for their reception. His worship had been informed by Peverell of the pause in their proceedings; and he had, of course, suspended both his hospitable and his magisterial attentions. Finally, therefore, it was agreed, not that they would positively go the next night, but that they positively would not go this night; and, shortly after, they left Lacy's house.

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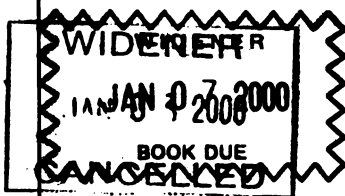


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